

2012

# Equipped to serve our youth: a phenomenological study of 4-H Extension youth educators' perceptions of the value of mentoring

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EQUIPPED TO SERVE OUR YOUTH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF 4-H  
EXTENSION YOUTH EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE  
VALUE OF MENTORING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Human Resource Education  
and Workforce Development

by

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B.A., Louisiana State University, 2004  
M.S. Louisiana State University, 2006  
May, 2012

## DEDICATION

*Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land which the LORD your God gives thee.*

– Deuteronomy 5:16 (NASB)

This work is dedicated to my parents, Donald and Jean Ann Bruchhaus, who have shown the truest love and dedication to my life. They have been my rock through this academic endeavor. I ask the Lord God to surround them with angels of protection as they partake on their daily journeys because they are so very precious to me. I have faced challenges that may have overcome my strength and will if it were not for my father and mother standing with me. They have servant hearts and pure spirits that are demonstrated in their actions and speech. It is an honor to dedicate this work to my parents. It is from them that I have learned the true meaning of showing compassion and love to others as well as having thankful hearts for all of God's blessings and people.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*We don't accomplish anything in this world alone...and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something.*

-- Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

The Lord has blessed me richly with more people to love and who love me. I have been provided with guidance, instruction, and most importantly time by many who have demonstrated kindness and compassion throughout my educational journey. I am fortunate to have gained a deeper understanding of mentoring research, theory, and practice through this study. Now, I realize even more how several very important persons in my life have served in the mentor role hoping for my advancement and development.

My professors have always believed in me as a person and a scholar. Dr. Joe Kotrlik has been a major influence on my academic career, personal and professional growth, and success in taking on the academic world. He has supported fully my endeavors that have taken me across the globe as well as expanded my territory. Although he may not have always understood where the mission arose or my motive for enlisting, Dr. Kotrlik backed me as I traveled to Belize, East Africa, West Africa, Europe, and China. The belief that Dr. Joe has in me has given me the confidence to push forward and reach higher in my academic and professional journey. Any student is fortunate to have the opportunity to work with Dr. Kotrlik as he gives his heart to his work and the students that call on him. I am thankful that he has been a fan of “Team Allison” always letting me know that he is cheering loudly.

My professors expected diligence and completion of good work. They held me to higher standards of excellence and professionalism. Dr. Krisanna Machtmes is a woman that deserves great respect. She has always seen me as a person going through life and all that it brings before

she saw me as a student. She has always shown genuine compassion and sincerity for my well-being and happiness in addition to my academic and career success. I am thankful for the real conversations and our friendship that has developed during this demanding academic endeavor.

It was during the time that I worked as a graduate assistant for Dr. Janet Fox in 4-H Youth Development for the state of Louisiana that I learned about the importance of surrounding oneself with driven, Christian supervisors. Dr. Fox contributed to my knowledge of research, writing, and practice. She showed me how to conduct research, work with youth, and develop positive programming for adults, youth, and adolescents. More dear to me is that she demonstrated the importance of being true to myself in answering God's call and serving the Lord however He calls. She and others in the Louisiana State 4-H Office were strong examples for me during the beginning years of my graduate studies.

My new family at Louisiana College has extended open arms this year when I moved to Pineville, Louisiana upon accepting my current position as Director of College Communications. This position has been challenging, but my new family at LC has embraced me and supported me as I traversed through my final semester of doctoral work and the completion of my dissertation. The LC community is a very special place unique in its very own way. It is a place where everyone is a team player wearing many hats and devoting many hours of their lives to the work of the Lord and serving the students that walk the halls on campus.

This would not be complete without a special thank you to my brothers, Donnie and Michael, who have been my champions – always rooting for me as I set and take on goals in my life. Our memories began on the family farm working in the rice fields and practicing basketball to be the best we could be. They taught me discipline and always sought to protect me. Many

times they both have been there for me when I have needed my big brothers. They have been faithful in praying for me and giving me sound advice when I needed it most.

I have been blessed with many wonderful people, angels, in navigating the course of my life. I know I am in the palm of God's hand. Though there are times when I yearn to see Him, the grace He has given to us in Jesus Christ and our salvation is like no other gift imaginable in this world. It is all of these many blessings that have made this pursuit of academic achievement possible.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Challenging economic times and increasingly complex social contexts intensify the demand for organizations to focus on areas of human resource development that positively contribute to developmental relationships of employees. One such method is the implementation of a formal mentoring program.

Mentoring is especially important for 4-H youth educators. Youth educators are usually specialized in program development among other areas and plan, implement, and evaluate programs with the intent of bettering the quality of life for youth. The dynamics of working with today's youth mandate effective professional development and developmental relationships for career enhancement.

This study was developed for the researcher to take an in-depth look into mentoring relationships for new 4-H youth educators. The following research questions were investigated: How do Extension educators perceive the value of mentoring Extension educators in Louisiana? How do Extension educators perceive the value of formal and informal mentoring programs in Louisiana?

Seven 4-H youth educators, hired within the past one to five years, participated in this study and were interviewed by the researcher. This communication and interaction provided details and explanations regarding the formal mentoring program and tendencies for new 4-H youth educators within the organization to find informal mentors. The participants shared personal and professional expectations, hopes, and needs as novice 4-H youth educators. Several components that contribute to successful, professional developmental relationships were found to be lacking with "formal" mentors among participants despite finding these elements in developmental relationships with "informal" mentors.

The findings of this study contributed to suggestions for an effective and efficient formal mentoring program for 4-H youth educators. In addition, the researcher concluded there are numerous implications that reinforce the need for the development and implementation of a revised formal mentoring program in the organization.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Sarah walked along the shaded trail with the other campers under the tall trees and many plants on the forest floor. There were others reaching out to touch the various plants and looking for interesting critters and bugs. Some campers were searching for animal prints along the trail. Meanwhile, Sarah was simply enjoying the feeling of freedom in the forest that she rarely feels during the entire year living in the city. Some of the other kids at camp live in the country and suburbs and they told Sarah how they play in places like this every day after school and especially on the weekends. She tried to imagine having such a wide-open playground so near to her home all of the time. Her place that she calls a playground is indoor and always full with other kids of all ages competing for space to play their own games. Sarah longed for camp every year where she would learn about nature and participate in outdoor activities while laughing with other campers. Sarah loved the afternoons at camp when she could get in the boats in the lake behind the cabins. She also cherished the time with everyone camping with her. As she continued along the trail, Sarah noticed the smell, the sounds, and the cool air of the forest. She wanted to take in every detail of her surroundings. Sarah saw a flower and thought about the person who invited her to camp – her 4-H Extension youth educator. Thinking it was a beautiful flower; she picked it and surprised her agent with the gift upon arrival back at her cabin.

Many youth gain exposure to fantastic adventures and landscapes through the programs and safe environment offered through 4-H that they would not see otherwise. If this were not the case, their eyes to the world would only consist of what occurs in their local community. 4-H changes that simple reality for many youth, especially those living in urban areas (Skuzza, 2004). This exposure to new experiences and places is just one way that 4-H contributes to the positive development of youth. As Sarah thought about her agent and the agent being the reason she even

knew about summer camp, she realized one day she would love to become a youth educator so she could give other youth opportunities like she has.

Four-H, the largest youth development organization in the nation, is led by a guiding mission to empower youth. Young people are supported by an expansive network of caring adults including administrators, agents, club leaders, and volunteers across America through involvement in 4-H. The National 4-H Organization offers countless programs in partnership with Land-Grant Universities and the Cooperative Extension System. Research-based information is “extended” to the members of communities across the nation through the routine demonstrations and voices of Extension Agents (Conglose, 2000).

The role of an Extension educator is vital in the lives of members (Skuza, 2004). Youth are faced with so many challenges, and Extension educators offer a positive outlook, research-driven ways to handle situations, and welcoming hearts willing to give time to help (Skuza, 2004). Extension educators play such a vital role in the development of youth that they must be professionally trained and prepared to take on whatever life brings for the young people they interact with through their jobs (Byington, 2010; Safrit, 2006). Goering (1980) claimed, “The identification of the critical components of the job should provide food for thought for the seasoned, experienced youth agent and thoughtful guidance to newly employed 4-H and youth agents, as they strive to succeed in their positions” (p. 27). Extension educators are prepared for the critical components of the job through various forms of training, including mentoring.

Extension educators fulfill many roles. The vast array of responsibilities held by Extension Agents add to the value of mentoring. Through the development of a positive relationship with a mentor, a beginning Extension educator can mature quickly through this form of professional development. Adults who care for young people are essential to the positive

development of youth (Skuzza, 2004). Extension educators fill an important niche in working with youth and can more adequately fill this role through personal and professional development in successful mentoring programs.

Competitiveness, recruiting, and retention of dedicated, talented employees are of concern for most organizations. This is especially true during the difficult economic situation currently facing the nation. Organizations aim to help new employees feel a sense of belonging among coworkers and the organization, to develop their capability to perform necessary tasks and contribute to the mission of the organization, and to foster a strong connection that brings about a sense of pride and desire to continue working with the organization (Kram, 1988).

The national 4-H youth development organization is no different. Across the nation, programs are in place to retain committed and enthusiastic Extension educators. Many states have mentoring programs in place – both formal and informal. Place and Bailey (2010) noted, “Extension educators and systems would benefit greatly from a comprehensive statewide mentoring program” (p. 7). These mentoring programs have similar characteristics as well as different aspects including years of experience to be a mentor, length of program, and program design.

However, whatever type of mentoring program may be in place, mentoring is an effective professional development tool when well-designed. Safrit (2006) provided,

Whatever the definition, mentoring as a human resource development intervention usually involves four major components. An inexperienced employee (protégé) is paired with a successful experienced employee (mentor). Together, they build a professional and personal relationship based upon mutual respect and trust, for the purposes of better ensuring the protégé’s competencies and success in his/her professional responsibilities. However, the mentoring experience also contributes to the personal and professional development of the mentor as well. (Introduction section, para. 5)

The collection of the perceptions of the value of mentoring for Extension educators is the focus of this study. Kotrlik and Higgins (2011) conducted a research study titled, “A National

Study of Extension 4-H Mentoring Programs: Perceived Mentoring Environment, Mentoring Characteristics, and Change in Competence.” The data collected in this study led to the following conclusions that prompted the development of this study. Their findings served as the basis for this qualitative study. They acknowledged the necessity for mentoring programs in Extension and believe there is limited information addressing the benefits of Extension mentoring programs (Kotrlik & Higgins, 2011). Their findings suggested there are many questions to consider in the development of a professional mentoring program designed for Extension educators based on perceptions of work environment, promotion and tenure systems, and effectiveness to perform (Kotrlik & Higgins, 2011).

The concept of mentoring is multi-faceted and is intertwined with adult learning theory in the areas of professional development and management. Researchers have explored mentoring in many fields and among different age groups. Mentoring has become an area of greater focus in recent times along with adult learning theory. Clearly understood and combined together, research-based information on adult learning theory and mentoring is a powerful asset to further the capacity of employees. There is great potential for in-depth professional development for employees who are exposed to research-driven information in these areas.

It is the hope of leaders, researchers and stakeholders to continue mentoring as part of professional development efforts for 4-H Extension youth educators. Professional development programs in 4-H have even greater potential within a nationwide network. According to Boleman et al. (2002), “It is well understood that there are tremendously effective and accomplished Extension agents throughout the country” (Conclusions section, para. 1). How does this aspect of orientation and training affect the capacity for growth and professional development for new employees in youth development? Ongoing research efforts and

strategizing provide direct correlations of success, conclusions for adaptation in programming, and innovative approaches to professional development (Conklin, Hook, Kelbaugh, & Nieto, 2002).

Extension educators need to be capable and prepared to develop programming and aid in the positive development of youth in the area of life skill development. Life skill development is fundamental to youth development and at the center of the mission of 4-H youth development across the world. In today's time of struggle for many families, there is a need for both prevention and intervention programs (Mincemoyer et al., 2008).

Four-H youth development has Extension educators in counties throughout the nation. These valuable staff members develop programming, serve as volunteer administrators and collaborators, and promote participation in 4-H clubs, programs, and activities. They do this for the benefit of youth. The youth involved in 4-H youth development learn important lessons about life skill development, leadership, and citizenship (Weyhrauch, Culbertson, Mills, & Fullagar, 2010). These three areas are essential to positive 4-H programming. It is the youth educator's role to have the awareness, understanding, and capability to develop programming that positively affects youth during such an absorbent and concentrated time of development in life.

Four-H youth educators are provided with training, resources, and mentoring programs to contribute to their continuing education and current knowledge on issues related to youth development and what is affecting the lives of youth. As time goes on, the issues affecting youth change and 4-H youth educators are in a position to positively affect their development and ability to handle trying times with resilience. There must be continual growth of methods for working with youth and awareness of what is challenging youth. As Boleman et al. (2002)

pointed out, “With societal changes, effective professional development programming must change with the clientele” (Conclusions section, para. 1). Ongoing professional development through a solid mentoring experience is one way to do just that.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study will focus on aspects of the mentoring process through exploratory analysis as seen through the eyes of Extension youth educators involved in the lives of youth in the state of Louisiana. These youth educators see that young people are resources to be shaped and molded into positive contributors to a society in need of life skill development, regardless of the setting. Youth development organizations conduct numerous evaluations and publish countless reports. Research published regarding professional development studies and specifically mentoring of Extension educators can make a positive contribution to mitigating any impediment toward progress. There is great importance in ensuring effective professional development of Extension youth educators.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe a sample of 4-H youth educators’ perceptions of the value of mentoring for Extension educators and to present a rich description of the lived experience for 4-H youth educators in a mentoring program within their context through a phenomenological approach. This research study will be significant for researchers interested in the lived experience of a small group of Extension educators’ perceptions of the value of mentoring. This research study will be important in continuing effective programs for professional development and will contribute to existing research and theory on the meaning of mentoring for professional development among Extension educators. This study will add to the existing body of knowledge regarding Extension educators’ orientation and training as well as contribute to an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

## **Research Questions**

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Extension educators perceive the value of mentoring Extension educators in Louisiana?
2. How do Extension educators perceive the value of formal and informal mentoring programs in Louisiana?

## **Significance of the Study**

The everyday inner workings of organizations require many hands, eyes, ears, and thoughts. In today's society, organizations and businesses are expanding rapidly with growing numbers of employees. It is vital to the survival and future development of these organizations and businesses to continue their operation in a way that promotes consistency while also retaining and training the most valuable resource – people. In a study of Extension youth educator turnover, Strong and Harder (2009) noted, “A mentoring program was identified as important in retaining and training of employees” (Findings section, para. 7).

This study is designed to explore and capture a greater understanding of the youth educators' perceptions of the mentoring of 4-H Extension youth educators to better serve the employees, the organization, and the youth of 4-H. Progressing to a greater understanding of the perceived contributions of mentoring to the organization will not only add to prior research on mentoring in youth development but also provide depth to a growing area of professional development. Kutilek and Earnest (2001) shared, “Mentoring and coaching have become a part of the everyday workplace contributing to increased job satisfaction, personal productivity, and employment stability within an organization” (Background section, para. 2) as well as, “With the increase of diversity in the workplace, as well as the fast-paced changing work environment,

mentoring and coaching have become essential components for managers and leaders”

(Background section, para. 4).

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Theoretical Framework

In selecting the theoretical framework for this study after a careful review of literature, it became clear there is much more precedence placed on the task of developing practical mentoring programs and applications than on the theoretical or research foundations of mentoring. Therefore, there is a lack of strong theoretical development in the area of mentoring (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). There are many studies with a lack of theoretical foundation among the hundreds of published pieces available on mentoring. However, this study is based on Kram's mentor role theory (1988). This theory provides a clear lens for exploring 4-H extension youth educators' perceptions of the value of mentoring.

Kram's (1988) Phases of the Mentor Relationship are based on research conducted on mentor relationships and listed below in Table 3. There are significant times of change, emotional variation, and career growth throughout the four phases as well as explanation for transition to following phases (Kram, 1988). Kram (1988) mentioned "career functions" and "psychosocial functions" in the cultivation phase after explaining the importance of these functions in mentoring relationships, "Together these functions enable individuals to address the challenges of each career stage" p. 23. This theory provides an appropriate framework for gathering an in-depth perspective of the role of mentoring for professional development among Extension educators (Extension educators) in this qualitative study.

Kram (1988) addressed transition between each phase as well as providing details explaining the progression through each phase. Addressing times of change, growth, and transition is important to the study of mentoring for Extension educators who are often required to adjust to the evolving demands of their positions (Strong & Harder, 2009).

Table 1. Kram's (1988) Phases of the Mentor Relationship

Phase	Definition	Turning points <sup>a</sup>
Initiation	A period of six months to a year when the relationship begins and becomes important to both managers.	Fantasies become expectations. Expectations are met; senior manager provides coaching, challenging work, visibility; junior manager provides technical assistance, respect, and desire to be coached. There are opportunities for interaction around work tasks.
Cultivation	A period of two to five years when the maximum range of career and psychosocial functions are provided.	Both individuals continue to benefit from the relationship. Opportunities for meaningful and more frequent interaction increase. Emotional bond deepens and intimacy increases.
Separation	A period of six months to two years after a significant change in the structural role relationship and/or in the emotional experience of the relationship.	Junior manager no longer wants guidance but rather the opportunity to work more autonomously. Senior manager faces midlife crisis and is less available to provide mentoring functions. Job rotation or promotion limits opportunities for continued interaction; career and psychosocial functions can no longer be provided. Blocked opportunity creates resentment and hostility that disrupt positive interaction.
Redefinition	An indefinite period after the separation phase when the relationship ends or takes on significantly different characteristics, making it a more peer like friendship.	Stresses of separation diminish, and new relationships are formed. The mentor relationship is no longer needed in its previous form. Resentment and anger diminish; gratitude and appreciation increase. Peer status is achieved.

<sup>a</sup>Examples of the most frequently observed psychological and organizational factors that cause movement into the current phase (Kram, 1988).

According to Kram (1988), mentoring occurs in four distinct phases including “initiation,” “cultivation,” “separation,” and “redefinition” (p. 48). The initiation phase is the beginning stage in which the mentoring relationship is started. Next, the cultivation phase is a time when both

mentoring functions – career and psychosocial – are provided at full capacity. The third phase, the separation phase, occurs after a change in the dynamics of the mentoring relationship. The fourth and final phase of redefinition has an undefined time span despite having a definite arrangement. The mentor and the mentee either reestablish a relationship of some form or completely end any relationship.

### **Mentoring**

Some of the oldest examples of mentoring begin with figures who etched their name in history books. The originality of mentoring has roots in Greek mythology found in Homer's *The Odyssey* in which a man named Mentor was entrusted to teach and care for Odysseus' son, Telemachus (Byington, 2010). Telemachus was delegated the role to care for the kingdom and counseling Telemachus when Odysseus fought in the Trojan War (Byington, 2010).

In a review of literature encompassing orientation, training, and other professional development programs, a plethora of information was found. Mentoring programs for all ages including young students to older individuals have become a familiar part of organizational and professional development as well as everyday life (Murray, 2001). There are formal and informal mentoring programs with approved standards and others that are not considered programs at all but life relationships that may happen for those who are driven (Murray, 2001). The very foundation of mentoring is the people involved – the mentor and the mentee. There are many definitions for mentor. Bozeman and Feeney (2007) provided a compilation of definitions from numerous sources as shown in Table 2.

One way to clarify what has been recovered in a review of the literature on mentoring is to clarify what it is and is not. One of the prevailing themes that emerged in conducting a review

Table 2. Bozeman & Feeney's (2007) Mentoring Definitions

Mentoring Definitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Mentoring is defined as a developmental relationship that involves organizational members of unequal status or, less frequently, peers” (Bozionelos, 2004, p. 25).</li> <li>• “Mentoring is an intense long-term relationship between a senior, more experienced individual (the mentor) and a more junior, less experienced individual (the protégé)” (Eby &amp; Allen, 2002, p. 456).</li> <li>• “Mentors provide young adults with career-enhancing functions, such as sponsorship, coaching, facilitating exposure and visibility, and offering challenging work or protection, all of which help the younger person to establish a role in the organization, learn the ropes, and prepare for advancement” (Kram &amp; Isabella, 1985, p. 111).</li> <li>• “Mentoring is a developmental relationship typically occurring between senior and junior individuals in organizations” (McManus &amp; Russell, 1997, p. 145).</li> <li>• “The mentor is usually a senior, experienced employee who serves as a role model, provides support, direction, and feedback to the younger employee regarding career plans and interpersonal development, and increases the visibility of the protégé to decision-makers in the organization who may influence career opportunities” (Noe, 1988, p. 458).</li> <li>• “Traditionally, mentors are defined as individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing upward mobility and support to protégés careers” (Ragins, 1997b, p. 484).</li> <li>• “A mentor is generally defined as a higher-ranking, influential individual in your work environment who has advanced experience and knowledge and is committed to providing upward mobility and support to your career. Your mentor may or may not be in your organization and s/he may or may not be your immediate supervisor” (Ragins, Cotton, &amp; Miller, 2000, p. 1182).</li> <li>• “We conceptualized supervisory mentoring as a transformational activity involving a mutual commitment by mentor and protégé to the latter’s long-term development, as a personal, extra organizational investment in the protégé by the mentor, and as the changing of the protégé by the mentor, accomplished by the sharing of values, knowledge, experience, and so forth” (Scandura &amp; Schriesheim, 1994, p. 1589).</li> <li>• “We define mentors as ‘individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing upward support and mobility to their protégés’ careers” (Singh, Bains, &amp; Vinnicombe, 2002, p. 391).</li> <li>• “The term ‘mentor’ refers to a more senior person who takes an interest in sponsorship of the career of a more junior person” (Smith, Howard, &amp; Harrington, 2005, p. 33).</li> <li>• “Mentoring relationships facilitate junior colleagues’ (protégés) professional development and career progress” (Tepper, 1995, p. 1191).</li> </ul>

(table con'd)

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### Mentoring Definitions

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- “This study focuses on a more formal type of relationship between a senior member of an organization and a novice, in part, to address the growing emphasis organizations are placing on formal types of mentoring in the socialization and career development of many professionals” (Young & Perrewe, 2000, p. 613).
  - “A mentor is a person who oversees the career and development of another person, usually junior, through teaching, counseling, providing psychological support, protecting, and at times promoting or sponsoring. The mentor may perform any or all of the above functions during the mentor relationship” (Zey, 1984, p. 7).
- 

of literature is the aspect of uniqueness to mentoring. It is a very unique tool in which mentor and mentee have unique roles (Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, 2008). Mentoring is not mutually inclusive, but it is mutually exclusive with areas of professional development. Numerous terms and uses for mentoring have added to the intricacy of the development of a universal definition and theory of mentoring (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007).

Mentoring is often confused with an apprenticeship and is very similar to but not the same as coaching (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Kram (1988) suggested coaching is one facet of mentoring. Coaching in an athletic world implies direction to achieve victory and success. This is similar to coaching in life, organizations, and throughout the workforce. Mentors may coach, or advise, mentees in the ways of the game or job to direct them toward accomplishment and achievement (Kram, 1988). The most basic detail to pinpoint in describing mentoring is the clarification of the foundation of having two people working toward a positive goal (Forehand, 2008). Mentoring is not dependent on age, but the mentor should have greater knowledge than the mentee (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Mentoring programs offer a tailored approach to learning as Landry, Anthony, Swank, and Monseque-Bailey (2009) pointed out, “An advantage of mentoring is its ability to individualize professional development to the needs of the learner...” (p. 449).

The environments in which mentoring can occur is unlimited. It is happening throughout workdays among coworkers in organizations, in military war theaters among officers and troops, and countless other environments. Mentoring does happen both formally and informally. Businesses, large organizations, and certain professions are ideal settings for formal mentoring programs. However, many roles are experienced hands-on with a mentor in informal mentoring. Citing the various assumptions in theory regarding mentoring as compared to other activities, Bozeman and Feeney (2007) arranged a comparison of different methods for professional development. The summary in Table 3 illustrates the different methods of professional development.

The comparison of formal training, socialization, and mentoring by Bozeman and Feeney (2007) highlighted specific criteria and distinctions regarding number of participants, nature of relationships, satisfaction of needs, and the use of work-related knowledge. The importance of the separation among comparison factors and distinct categories – one of which is mentoring – ultimately provides insight into the definition and grounding mentoring theory.

Ultimately, in business and professional fields, it is the goal of employers to hire, train and retain employees to fit the needs of their organization. Mentoring is a recognized method of development in many fields and has been the subject of much attention by researchers (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). Allen et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of career benefits for protégés addressing the importance of a continued focus on mentoring. The authors noted the importance of mentoring in organizational settings and disclosure of the benefits for protégés.

In addition, Gilbreath, Rose and Dietrich (2008) comprised an evaluation of instruments used for the assessment of mentoring programs. After doing so, they concluded there is an

enormous impact made by effective mentors in organizations (Gilbreath, Rose & Dietrich, 2008). The authors did not hesitate in clarifying the need for operative evaluation and measurement of the value of mentoring relationships.

Table 3. Bozeman & Feeney’s (2007) Comparison of Three Processes for Transmitting Work-Related Knowledge

Comparison factors	Processes for Transmitting Work-Related Knowledge		
	Formal training	Socialization	Mentoring
Number of participants	Infinite	Dependent on group size	Dyads (including sets of dyads)
Relationship bases	Authority mediated	Informal, typically entailing unequal knowledge or experience	Informal, requiring unequal knowledge
Recognition	Recognition and self-awareness unavoidable	Does not require recognition	Requires recognition (by both parties) for role enactment
Needs fulfillment	Multiple, but must include organization or authority-derived objectives	Multiple, but must include group needs	Multiple, but must serve the needs of the two voluntary participants
Knowledge utility	Includes knowledge presumed relevant to attaining organization mission or goals of formal job requirements	May or may not serve sanctioned work objectives, knowledge develops or reinforces group norms	Must be work relevant, but from the self-interested perspective of the involved parties

### **Mentoring Process**

Mentoring is a sensible approach to continuing daily education while at work in one’s field (Place & Bailey, 2010). Many new employees are plagued with the notion of being a rookie, having innocence and naiveté, and receiving little attention for competency attributed to minimal experience (Place & Bailey, 2010). To whom are new employees supposed to turn to

and ask for advice? How can new employees overcome the intimidating attitude from coworkers? New employees need a role model with professional competency in their field (Bellman, 2002). Matching a new employee with a mentor is one part of the process.

There are many steps in the mentoring process. It is important to train potential mentors prior to assigning them to a mentee (Kutilek, Gunderson, & Conklin, 2002). A mentee can then be assigned to a potential mentor who has received training. Mentors are better prepared to serve in the professional development role after training (Johnson, 2002). Several aspects must match up between the mentor and the mentee. Johnson (2002) suggested that the assigning of mentees to mentors in professional mentoring relationships is more efficient based on information revealed in training regarding a mentors experiences, styles, and talents. Also, mentees need a mentor who is both competent, a good communicator and aware of expectations of the mentee for the professional development relationship (Johnson, 2002).

Assigning a mentee to a mentor requires consideration of work ethic, work style, personality, learning and teaching styles, and level of extroversion. Being a mentor requires much patience, skill, and consideration for others. A mentor must have an understanding of the developmental needs of the mentee (Brown, Daly, & Leong, 2009). In addition, as Forehand (2008) noted, “. . . mentoring is characterized by two individuals, with one being responsible for nurturing and guiding the other, within a relationship that is dynamic, reciprocal, and set within a larger context (e.g., a university department)” (p. 745).

As with many areas, practices and research in selecting the proper mentor are not extensive for women and ethnic minorities. Brown, Daly, and Leong (2009) highlighted the need for emphasis in proper selection and further study for ethnic minorities in mentoring programs. They acknowledged barriers in mentoring for doctoral students in the field

psychology and warn of the effects of cultural barriers that may arise between mentors and mentees from different cultures including "...social isolation and alienation among ethnic minority mentees" (p. 309).

Selection of mentoring program participants requires attention to cultural and other possible barriers for the sake of both the mentor and mentee. However, mentors are not always chosen. In a comparison study of formal and informal mentoring, Ragins and Cotton (1999) asserted, "One key difference between formal and informal mentoring relationships is that informal mentoring relationships develop spontaneously, whereas formal mentoring relationships develop with organizational assistance or intervention – usually in the form of voluntary assignment or matching of mentors and protégés" (p. 529).

Often, natural mentor relationships begin without a mentee being assigned to a mentor in a workplace or paired up with an elder member of an organization for experiential learning. In a study focusing on Mexican American adolescents' relationships with adults who were not their parents, Sanchez, Reyes, and Singh (2006) stated, "Relationships with natural mentors, VIPs, and extended family members are viewed to be powerful and influential. These individuals provide emotional support, serve as role models, and motivate young people" (p. 616).

New employees will experience common and uncommon problems. Mentors do not always have the correct solutions to all problems but seek to find the answers to help mentees through times of change and transition. As McKimm, Jollie, and Hatter (2007) clarified, "A mentor is therefore someone who helps another person through an important transition such as coping with a new situation like a new job or a major change in personal circumstances or in career development or personal growth" (p. 1).

## **Context/Setting of Mentoring**

It is important that mentoring happen in its natural context. Mentoring is an exceptional opportunity for teaching when doing so in the natural setting at normal times. A new employee has the opportunity to learn from a mentor during a normal workday by taking part in everyday routines in the life of the mentor at work. Working with a mentor on certain activities that are regularly part of one's job is reinforcement for occupational competency (Kutilek & Earnest, 2001).

What is unique about the context of a mentorship? The authenticity of mentoring programs ranges expansively from small to large, in the elements of nature to inside a building, and formal to informal as well as many more diverse conditions. Different programs work better in one setting as compared to others. The educational system is an example of a well-studied (contextually) environment in which mentoring readily takes places that reflects vast uniqueness. As Orland-Barak (2006) stated, "Acknowledging the uniqueness of the mentoring context and the significance attributed to multifaceted roles of mentors as agents of change in the educational system is important to better understand what and how mentors construct knowledge about their practice" (p. 15).

The context of mentoring has changed over centuries as society evolves, human needs change, occupations emerge, and technology advances. All of these factors affect professional development and growth of employees. Advancement in technology has added to the realm of avenues for mentoring programs. Mentoring is now being done online. Knouse (2001) suggested, "An alternative to personal mentoring is to use the resources and accessibility of the Internet as a means of mentoring, variously termed 'virtual mentoring' or 'telementoring'" (p. 163).

Although some may disagree that this is truly mentoring, Russell and Perris (2003) noted, “The field of telementoring research is in its infancy” (p. 236). The natural setting of mentoring is still part of online mentoring programs; however, mentor and mentee are in different locations. Is this truly mentoring? Virtual mentoring does offer solutions to certain problems for career development including instant access to vast amounts of information as well as mentoring relationships that span the globe (Knouse, 2001).

There are both highly common and quite uncommon circumstances in various mentoring programs depending on the natural context in which mentoring takes place. There are certain factors that go with the territory especially considering the demeanor of the mentor in their natural work setting. For example, the encouragement offered in most mentoring relationships is not something that is guaranteed (Darwin & Palmer, 2009).

Mentoring programs – whether formal or informal – serve different purposes (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). The mentors and mentees have agendas that are specific to the desires, goals, or needs present at the time in their situation. One field that has an extensive amount of literature is the medical field. Researchers have extensively studied mentoring relationships among clinical psychologists and nurses who are readily assigned to working with mentees in mentoring programs. The medical field is a competitive field with great challenge and times of overwhelming trial for students and new employees who must demonstrate competency in every area. Researchers have made significant strides in advancing the collection of evidentiary information acknowledging the effects of mentoring programs across career fields. Recognition by professionals in different fields of the role mentoring plays for new employees contributes to the previous accolades of others in history who have devoted energy and time to mentoring programs.

Heale, Mossey, Lafoley, and Gorham (2009) indicated there is a great need for mentoring in the clinical setting for health care professionals throughout the medical field. Bellman (2002) provided the aims of a scheme in one medical program run by the Department of General Practice & Primary Care, Guy's, King's & St. Thomas's School of Medicine:

- (1) encourage experienced individuals to share their knowledge and expertise in professional development
- (2) provide support and encouragement between individuals in identifying professional development needs and creating a plan to meet those needs, and
- (3) develop a multi-professional learning environment (p. 402).

The medical field, like many others, has customary methods for programming. This is beneficial, but this can also be an obstacle for professional development in the field. Heale et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of mentoring in the medical field as well as certain barriers for clinical mentors. They concluded in their study, "The respondents of this clinical mentor survey determined that there are consistent barriers to this role across disciplines, and a generalized approach to address these barriers would allow for a better utilization of existing resources" (p. 377).

Circumstances differ extraordinarily across borders, fields, and relationships. As seen in the medical field, the authenticity and context is essential to the programmatic details in professional mentoring. Veith, Sherman, Pellino, and Yasui (2006), who sought to address several objectives in their qualitative study of peer mentoring among survivors of Spinal Cord Injuries (SCI), suggested, "...we move to the second objective, to identify the unique subjective components of the mentoring relationship that differentiate it from other supportive relationships" (p. 294).

Another field that offers extensive findings on mentoring is the field of education. Mixed results were found in review of the literature among different programs. Barrera, Braley, and Slate (2010) found, "...the incidence and the influence of the experiences of what and when vary by districts and by campuses. The initial purpose of the programs was to provide new teachers with the skills and knowledge to be successful..." (p. 63).

The behavior and practices of teachers who serve as mentors for newly employed teachers or those who are training to be teachers have been evaluated for increased effect from mentoring programs in the field of education. Conclusions made propose there is a focus on preparing teacher mentors to be more effective through training. Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen (2010) suggested,

Against the background of improving mentor teachers' use of supervisory skills, the study aimed at capturing frequencies of reflective moments, which are specific instances of time during mentoring dialogues in which mentor teachers' cognitions related to the use of supervisory skills are manifested consciously...To conclude, based on the assumption that the level of consciousness in a learning process is displayed by the frequency of mentor teachers' reflective moments during mentoring dialogues, the data of the study suggest the existence of different levels of consciousness in acquiring and using supervisory skills, the possibility of measuring reflectivity using concurrent and retrospective methods simultaneously and the potential of such measurements to inform and improve professional development opportunities for mentor teachers.

Mentoring is not coaching or an apprenticeship (Kotrlik & Higgins, 2011). Mentoring is, however, important at this time in the organizations and businesses around the country when employees have personal agendas and expect more from employers to experience job satisfaction, competency, and belonging. Mentoring contributes to filling a need for professional development, organizational development, and belonging for employees. The blend of learning and connection with others enhances the ability of individuals to handle adversity and transition (Zachary, 2005).

## **Benefits of Mentoring**

The benefits of mentoring in the 4-H Youth Development organization are numerous. Not only are the adults affected through the mentoring program, but the youth also reap benefits of the outcomes (Boleman et al. 2002). Byington (2010) clarified three of the “many benefits to successful mentoring relationships” by suggesting,

- Mentees are able to learn and grow under the mentor’s guidance.
- Mentees are able to experiment with creative solutions to problems within a safe and supportive environment.
- Mentees become stronger and intentional in their teaching.

There are countless benefits of mentoring across the world in different populations, professional positions, and roles. Kutilek et al. (2002) highlighted the difference in today’s time of shifting attitudes and outlooks toward careers,

In today’s world of work, organizational restructuring and technological changes are the norm. Career paths have shifted from climbing the corporate ladder to traversing the corporate landscape in search of job enrichment and satisfaction. In the search for career fulfillment, individuals may no longer plan to spend their entire work lives in one organization. (para. 1)

## **Gaps in Mentoring Research and Professional Development**

Although there are countless benefits of mentoring, there are negative effects that may hinder the success of many mentoring programs and the professional development of employees. Professional development is an evolving field. As with any field that rapidly changes as a result of additional attention and emphasis to improve programming, there are difficulties in monitoring and obtaining sound feedback. Heale et al. (2009) cited difficulty in evaluating and improving mentoring programs in the medical field, “Clinical mentors are often not employed by the education centre, a fact that contributes to difficulties in reaching this group” (p. 377). They

suggested using a common interdisciplinary approach to improve the mentoring process and subsequent evaluation.

In addition, there are many implications and suggestions for future research to work on filling the gaps of research-based information on mentoring programs for professional development. In a study conducted in a non-Western culture, researchers highlighted the importance of building trust in mentoring relationships for greater success in mentoring programs (Wang, Tomlinson, & Noe, 2010). They also emphasized the importance of ongoing research regarding the importance and development of trust in mentoring relationships, “Future research is also needed to assess the generalizability of our results to different cultures, informal mentoring relationships, different types of formal mentoring programs, and more gender-diverse mentoring relationships” (p. 365).

#### **4-H Youth Development**

Many authors and researchers have written about the value and place of mentoring for Extension educators (e.g., Byington, 2010; Kutilek & Earnest, 2001; Safrit, 2006). After conducting a review of literature in regards to mentoring of Extension educators, researchers found there is agreement among authors that mentoring is an essential element of professional development for Extension personnel (Kotrlik & Higgins, 2011). Four-H is often associated with vocational education because of the history of the programming offered and the audiences addressed. Mentoring in the field of vocational education (currently known as career and technical education) is specialized. Preferably, mentors in vocational education support mentees as a result of their own local vocational endeavors, professional experience in one’s vocation, and a supportive relationship (Meijers, 2008).

Extension youth educators are specialized personnel who have experience and expertise in a particular area (Place & Bailey, 2010). This study focused on Extension educators. Place

and Bailey (2010) clarified their belief in mentoring and professional development for new employees in such an evolving role having simply stated, “Extension needs new employees to develop skills quickly to the level at which they can perform their work efficiently and effectively” (Background section, para. 2).

Not only must Extension educators be efficient and effective in their roles, but they must also be thoroughly trained and prepared to mentor clientele. Although mentoring is not new to Extension, it is also not just a professional development program for Extension youth educators but an area of valuable programming also offered to others (Byington, 2010). Byington provided a thorough description of what makes a successful mentoring relationship listing “keys” in discussing a current Nevada Cooperative Extension mentoring program for childcare center employees. According to Byington (2010), these are to:

- Develop a relationship of trust
- Define roles and responsibilities
- Establish short and long term goals
- Collaborate to solve problems.

Byington’s (2010) clear-cut points are directed towards an Extension agent and a non-Extension employee. Others have highlighted valuable keys or points for internal Extension mentoring relationships. Kutilek et al. (2002) expressed the need for a systematic approach to continuing development of employees with four stages open to flexibility keeping in mind the variability of time spent with an organization. In their description of a model used by Ohio State University Extension for professional development, Kutilek et al. (2002) asserted, “Continuing professional development for employees is critical to meet the demands and expectations of the evolving workplace” (para. 5). The first stage of the model includes a peer-mentoring program

designed by and for Extension employees requiring potential mentors to participate in training before selection (Kutilek et al. 2002).

Boleman et al. (2002) addressed the changing needs of the people and communities served by 4-H County Extension Agents and described the “4-H BEST (Building Essential Skills and Training)” activity for professional development in Texas. What is unique about this 2-day educational program is the post-program out-of-state discourse with a mentor. The authors believe one of the strengths of this program is that it “...establishes a network among Extension agents nationwide” (Conclusions section, para. 1). Further, Boleman et al. (2002) concluded, “This program’s agenda opens the doors for collaborations, innovations, and idea sharing for Extension professionals” (Conclusions section, para. 1).

There are others who sighted the additional productivity, effectiveness, and impact for clientele with the implementation of internal Extension mentoring programs (Place & Bailey, 2010). Place and Bailey (2010) concluded statewide programs would benefit Extension educators after conducting a study on a mentoring program for new Extension employees within the organization preventing fatigue in new Extension positions. Recommendations from this and other examples provide valuable insight and reinforcement on the consensus of the role of mentoring for Extension employees.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

Mentoring, specifically within an organizational setting, fosters the development of relationships that provide both challenges and opportunities (Kram, 1988). Five common misconceptions of mentoring provided by Kram (1988) lend further clarity to the context of mentoring relationships within the organizational setting. First, the younger person is not the only beneficiary of the relationship. Second, the experience may not always be positive. Third, not all mentor relationships are the same. Fourth, mentor relationships are not necessarily accessible to everyone interested. Lastly, mentors are not mandatory for career success.

Considering these misconceptions does not preclude research on mentoring, but this does offer a lens that was used to frame this study. The theoretical framework used for this study is based on Kram's (1988) mentor role theory. The descriptive qualitative design of this study contributed to the literature base in consideration of this theory. In addition, the design addressed the purpose of this study – to explore and describe the perceptions of the value of mentoring for Extension 4-H youth educators and to present a rich description of the phenomena within this context through a qualitative approach.

A phenomenological approach was chosen to gather an in-depth look into the perspectives of the youth educators. According to Daly (2007), “Phenomenology has its roots in philosophy. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) began with the problem of how objects, actions, and events appear in the consciousness of the actor” (p. 94). It was decided that this is the proper qualitative approach to take in discovering answers to the research question, especially considering the data collected by Kotrlik and Higgins in their study (2011). A phenomenological approach was used in this study to explore the lived experience of participants. Daly (2007) clarified the essence of phenomenology in research:

Although closely related to the study of meaning, Phenomenology places a focus on the study of individual consciousness. Of particular interest here are the ways individuals gear into their taken-for-granted life worlds. This includes an interest in not only the individual's subjective perceptions of that world but how that individual understands experience within the intersubjective milieu of the shared social environment. (p. 82)

This exploratory qualitative study was focused on the lived experiences of participants rather than the development of or substantiating theory (Daly, 2007). This required an appropriate disciplinary orientation and research design. Phenomenological studies are centered on an "object" or phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, p. 63). This separates phenomenological studies from other descriptive studies (van Manen, 1990). A phenomenological descriptive design using personal narratives from interviews with individuals in selected locations across Louisiana provided a rich description of the lived experience for this group of participants. It was the goal of the researcher to present a written report based on personal interpretation with references accompanied by exact details of commentary and observations. In regards to context, the phenomenological approach was appropriate in studying the process, preliminary influence, and initial impact involved in professional development for Extension educators.

Furthermore, a phenomenological approach permitted the researcher the opportunity to provide a detailed account of the characteristics of the group member's interactions with others as the process took place within the context of the experience (Daly, 1995). The phenomenological approach also provided an in-depth look into the 4-H culture and mentoring as the phenomenon of focus. This study focused on the interpretation and description of mentoring for Extension educators as part of the 4-H culture. In support of the importance of understanding the authentic context and culture of the organization, Kram (1988) provided:

Features of the organization, including its culture, the reward system, task design, and performance management systems, affect relationships by shaping individuals' behavior. It is essential to understand how an organization's structures and processes influence

behavior in order to maintain those features that encourage supportive relationships and to modify those that impede them. (p. 15)

This was a foundational study designed to provide an initial description of the lived experience for Extension educators as mentees. This study contributes to future research designed to gather in-depth information regarding involvement in mentoring programs. The researcher sought to answer questions and fill in gaps in the knowledge of the process that occurs when Extension 4-H Agents are being mentored. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Extension educators perceive the value of mentoring Extension 4-H youth educators agents in Louisiana?
2. How do Extension 4-H youth educators perceive the value of formal and informal mentoring programs in Louisiana?

### **Participant Selection**

Participants were selected based on being “an example of the experience of interest” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Careful selection of the participants for this phenomenological study was essential (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Information may be gathered from either a single participant or multiple participants in qualitative research. The purpose of this study centered on the perceptions of the value of mentoring programs for Extension educators. Therefore, to provide relevant data and a thick description addressing the purpose of the study, the researcher carefully considered how many participants to select for a study.

It was also important to take into account that the nature of this study provides less human resource capacity than a funded study or supplemented study. There was one researcher. Therefore, there was one interviewer, one transcriber, and one’s own time to design and conduct the study. In consideration of these details, the number of participants was selected with the

understanding that the researcher must have considerable access to meet with the participants of the study.

This qualitative study used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007). Purposeful sampling was essential for selection of research participants in this study. Of equal importance was decision making regarding strategy and size in this qualitative design (Creswell, 2007). A snowball sampling strategy was used to identify participants that provided rich information and were readily accessible through the recommendation of others aware of their experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

The target population of this study was the Extension educators who serve the members of the 4-H youth development organization in a southern state. The sample consisted of seven youth educators from locations across the state. Considering the aforementioned details of design and the purpose of the study to explore the perceptions of the value of mentoring for Extension educators, the seven participants were selected on the basis of having previously or concurrently participating as mentees in a mentoring process.

The Extension educators who were selected as participants in this study have been employed in their current position for a minimum of one year and are very familiar with the mentoring process that is part of the professional development offered to employees. Participants were asked individually about their perceptions of the mentoring process and of the value of involvement personally and professionally. The level of exposure for the participants in the countless 4-H activities, administrative processes, and expectations in the development of 4-H programming varied. However, there were limitations among level of experience as a 4-H youth educator. Therefore, the participants selected had at a minimum one year to less than five years of experience as an Extension educator. The researcher understood the importance of

being adaptive and maintaining a flexible demeanor while working with participants through the completion of the study.

Each participant was contacted via e-mail and telephone for consent to participate in the study. The researcher also confirmed with each participant to digitally record the interviews and have the recording transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Transcribed interview files were sent to respective participants upon completion for consent of the transcription.

### **Data Collection**

There is much to discover about the perceptions of mentoring for Extension educators. Initially focusing on a sample of participants in one state for this qualitative study provided a rich description to build upon for future development. Many questions were asked and answered in this study, but it was of the utmost importance for the researcher to remain focused on the research questions (van Manen, 1990). There is much to learn and progress to be made in the lives of the Extension educators who give their lives to serve youth participating in 4-H.

The primary source of data was in-depth interviews with participants. There are various sources of data in qualitative research. However, the phenomenological design of this study related best to interviews as the principal source for data collection (Slife & Williams, 1995). One-on-one informal interviews ranging in formality and length were used in a phenomenological approach. The information derived from these interviews contributes a rich description of the value of formal and informal mentoring programs to Louisiana Extension educators.

Phenomenological research requires the researcher to engage in a process referred to as Epoche, a preparatory step before data collection that allows one to set aside preconceptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Social science researchers must be proactive in order to receive full disclosure with participants. The researcher stayed in the right frame of mind,

developed rapport with participants, and maintained an atmosphere that is conducive for sharing during interviews. The researcher set aside things that are irrelevant to the research study for “bracketing” and equally handling of all accounts with participants for “horizontalizing” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97).

One of the most important areas of decision making for the design of the study was the identification of what the researcher will be tracking (Daly, 2007). What were the most significant issues facing the agents who are mentored? How and why were these issues shared? The use of interviews continually guided the data collection process and solidified findings to increase the credibility of the study using triangulation as a strategy (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Interviews were employed in this study. Therefore, as the researcher, I began collecting data through initial conversation and interviews. In addition, analysis and interpretation were completed concurrently beginning in the earliest stages of data collection (Daly, 2007). This contributed to a rich description of the phenomenon. It was of the utmost importance to get a true sense of the context of the authentic workplace of the Extension educators. The researcher took caution in scheduling observation periods and inquiring about times of intense involvement during the club year, previously scheduled professional development, and personal holidays of the participants.

Researchers spend various lengths of time conducting qualitative studies. This study had a tentative period in the beginning stages of data collection. It was assumed that interviews would be approximately be 90 minutes with each of the participants. It was decided that follow-up interviews were not necessary as a point of saturation had been reached. Approaching the data collection phase of the research study with a clear understanding that the flow of the process can and may abruptly change enabled the researcher better adaptability when the need arose in

the field. This allowed the researcher to gather information prompted by change and relevant to the study. In addition, the researcher considered how much time it took before collecting enough data to reach a point of saturation for a sound account.

### **Data Analysis**

Among qualitative studies, there is variation in the steps followed in analyzing data. Although there is a common framework for data analysis procedures in qualitative research, evidence is prevalent of particular steps followed by researchers using different approaches in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007). Management of data is the primary starting point for qualitative research that will lead to an appropriate presentation of accounts of the meaning of the experience for participants in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007).

Data management consisted of organization of all materials in files labeled by the researcher in a specific system. Clearly, this was the first and foremost element of data analysis. It was of great importance to the researcher to carefully select the proper method of data analysis thereafter. There are several methods for data analysis in phenomenological research. Several of the methods were used in psychological research including that of Giorgi (2009), van Manen (1990), and Moustakas (1994). For the purpose of this study, Moustakas' phenomenological method of data analysis was used. Moustakas' (1994) method includes procedures including "horizontalizing," "clustered themes and meanings," and "structural descriptions and an integration of textures and structures into the meanings and essences of the phenomenon" (p. 118).

The abovementioned data management was the focus after open-ended interviews are conducted. The data collected during interviews with the participants was transcribed from digital recordings. The content was then categorized into categories using coding. Analysis of information occurred concurrently with data collection. Immediate transcription and review of

the materials from the interviews provided the researcher with clarity to make further notes. All accounts were carefully examined to correlate meanings of the mentoring experience among participants as well as meaning for a broader perspective of meaning of the phenomenon (Slife & Williams, 1995).

### **Quality of the Study**

The methodology of the study was developed prior to the commencing of conducting the research study. However, the data collection process evolved in this phenomenological qualitative study. It was important that quality is ensured despite the ebb and flow of the research study. Polkinghorne (1989) emphasized “valid” findings and identified questions for researchers in conducting a phenomenological study that were referred to throughout the process of this study:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the participants’ descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the participants’ actual experience?
2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?
3. In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives?
4. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?
5. Is the structural description situation specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations?

### **Bias Control – Role of the Researcher**

Patton (2002) clarified in his third edition text titled *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, “The quality of qualitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (p. 5). The role of the researcher is instrumental to the study. The realistic exposure to the environment where the action takes place was important to the interpretation of the context of the study. In this study, the researcher sought to identify closely with the youth educators involved as participants. Although this approach did not allow for objectivity, it was assumed that qualitative research in this study does not allow for complete objectivity but a subjective interpretation.

Ethnocentrism was avoided as much as humanly possible through careful self-reflection and reflexivity as well as declaration of any relevant personal biases. The goal of the researcher was to set aside personal bias and standards to gather and interpret relevant content from the participants regarding the meaning of their experience. Personal biases not attended to could have affected the validity of the study (Daly, 2007).

### **Lens of the Researcher**

The core of my personal beliefs in regards to this research identify with the base of the phenomenon studied. I was an active member of 4-H during elementary school, junior high school, and high school. I participated throughout the year in camps, contests, fundraisers, and other events. The 4-H youth educator that led our clubs had a great impact on my family and me. She is still a close friend of my family and many others in our community. I had a fortunate experience growing up with deep involvement in 4-H. In addition, I served as a volunteer leader for a 4-H club, a chaperone for several 4-H outings, and contributed to programming and evaluation of various activities.

One of the most influential experiences that affected the researcher's lens was my time serving as a graduate assistant in the state office for 4-H Youth Development. This work experience provided training and understanding of 4-H that connected me deeper to the phenomenon being studied. As a result of my involvement at this level, I was previously aware of issues confronting Extension educators. Although I have not filled the role of an Extension educator, my experience as a graduate assistant in the state 4-H office provided exposure that increased my level of insight.

This was both an advantage and disadvantage to the role of the researcher in this study. One cannot relinquish all memories and gratitude for a positive experience with a youth educator who remains a great example. However, the researcher has working knowledge of 4-H and the organizational demands of youth educators. All the while, the researcher sought to address this personal lens as an insider of the 4-H youth development organization.

### **Institutional Review Board**

The researcher requested approval from the Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board. The request for approval was submitted after approval by the graduate committee. Institutional Review Board approval (LSU IRB #E5593) was received to proceed with the study.

Louisiana State University's IRB regulations were closely adhered to throughout the study. The researcher had participants sign consent forms. In addition, the researcher carefully explained in great detail the voluntary process to participate and withdraw from the study at any time during the course of research. Participants were made aware that their identity would be concealed.

## **CHAPTER 4: ORGANIZING, ANALYZING AND SYNTHESIZING DATA**

The researcher used the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) for the purpose of organization, analysis, and synthesis of the data gathered in the study. This chapter is an accumulation of representative data according to the objectives of this study in the following order: horizontalization, meaning units, themes, and a composite textural-structural description.

### **Horizontalization**

Throughout the process of conducting the interviews, files were forwarded to a professional transcriptionist and then returned directly to the researcher before dissemination to each of the respective participants for corrections or additions. When presented with the transcriptions of the interviews for reflection and an opportunity to edit, the participants did not make any corrections or additions. The researcher considered this to be a true marker of the validity of their lived experiences addressed in the interviews. In addition, the researcher carefully reviewed each transcript for the purpose of reflection. During these periods of reflection epoche was exercised. The essence of the epoche component of the horizontalization process enables the researcher to reach a deeper point of understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The researcher sought to adhere to the process of horizontalization as part of the greater performing of phenomenological reduction. This is crucial to the authenticity and objectiveness from the researcher's perspective as part of the study. Although difficult, it was the goal of the researcher to position elements of the phenomenon on an equal level with no one element being more important than another. The researcher understood the importance of exercising phenomenological reduction and allowing one's previously held opinions and assumptions to shrink. Therefore, the researcher could then potentially see things in a different manner than one's previously defined perspectives.

## **Meaning Units of the Phenomenological Mentoring Study**

Each of the responses to the interview questions were carefully reviewed by the researcher in order to identify meaning units reaped from responses given by the participants throughout the dialogues. In order to cluster the meaning units from eight interviews, the researcher first organized the meaning units of each interview transcript. Next, the researcher continued the process of identifying the meaning units exposed in the study by clustering the important and relevant data clustered from each of the participant's interview transcripts. Horizons were created by the researcher by equally weighing statements according to importance of the phenomenon of interest.

Following are accounts of events, experiences, and stories from the narratives that contain the meaning units in the order of the interview questions posed to participants. Verbatim responses from the participants are given after eliminating unnecessary commentary. The researcher was cautious in selecting the statements taken from the transcripts and presented below to support the findings that are both descriptive and illuminating of the lived experiences of 4-H youth educators' involvement in the formal mentoring program of one state 4-H Youth Development Organization. Each respondent's transcript was equally reflected upon by the researcher and every comment taken into consideration to properly organize the meaning units clustered in the study.

\*Note: In the following section "Meaning Units," "XXXX" denotes names or specific places that have been designated as such in order to preserve confidentiality and anonymity of the research respondents.

## Meaning Units

### Meaning Unit #1

#### “What Is Your Definition Of Mentoring?”

- **Respondent 1**

“...somebody’s who has been in the position a lot longer than I have is supposed to kind of not necessarily hold my hand through it, but kind of, you know, pat me on the back on the bad days and say, “Okay, well if you’re confused about this, this is how I do it. This is not how you have to do it.” Not somebody who will babysit you but somebody that will kind of coach you along. Because we learn things in college but you don’t really learn until you get out there and 4-H’s motto is “Learn by Doing.” Sometimes you don’t know what to do until you know what to do. And so I feel like, you know, somebody who is a mentor is supposed to be that person for you; to kind of give you that extra nudge and, you know, like okay well you’re doing a good job but, you know, this is how you could approach it; not this is how you should.”

- **Respondent 2**

“I think the mentoring process involves at least two people. You have to have a mentor and a mentee...somebody who the person being mentored can look to.”

- **Respondent 3**

“In this job I guess they give you an experienced agent that would be there to guide you on finding programs or how you need to do your job in general.”

- **Respondent 5**

“Just guiding. Kind of leading somebody and just being there to help them in any way they needed it. You know, to make suggestions just kind of whenever they need it. Be there for them...”

- **Respondent 6**

“Mentoring is one on one...if you’re a mentor it’s an individual basis...Somebody that has an experience in some field regardless if it’s 4-H or building an airplane or whatever...Giving their expertise and knowledge to another person that has just got hired and helping pass that knowledge from one person to another.”

- **Respondent 7**

“Somebody to kind of tell you what you are supposed to do before you learn how to do it, I guess, I don’t know. Just kind of – if I have questions I can bounce them off of her. Hopefully, it’s somebody who’s been doing it for a long time and has some experience.”

“My definition of mentoring would be to provide guidance, support, and reassurance to a new agent....My definition hasn’t changed but things that I see I’m like I should have done this. You know, my approach maybe...has changed, but the definition no...like providing them more resources or outlines of things would maybe one approach that, “Oh I should have given them these contests rules that I had.”...again it kind of goes back to if they don’t know about it how are they going to ask the question or for help...I’m an old fashioned person in the fact that I want to meet somebody face-to-face; especially teaching. Which I guess is another word in the definition that I would include is teacher....Again a mentor for me is someone that you look up to, that will help you to succeed and has your best interest at heart...Support and encouragement...showing them, you know, the basics of youth development that the XXXX and the state 4-H office believe in so that they can begin with a good knowledge base.”

## Meaning Unit #2

### **“Do You Learn Skills For This Job When You Begin Work In the Field? What Was Your First Year Like? Did You Find That It Was Overwhelming At Times?”**

- **Respondent 3**

“I knew roughly. I showed chickens so all the cows, horses, pigs, goats, sheep stuff; I knew a little bit about it but I had no idea how you set up a show....So that was my first . . .To run it right. I knew how to attend one. That’s simple....But I didn’t know how . . .how you do all that...So once I overcame that learning curve then it was just, it was pretty simple from there...the first livestock show that we had after I started was the fair and that one is so informal . . .I make the rules for it...If you want to show an animal we’ll find a spot for it . . . that kind of thing...I’ll find a place for it...So that was my first trial run...I made a few minor adjustments but then after the first show of course I was taking notes at the show like we need to do this next time. We need to change this next time. So once I worked out my kinks the next show that we have is our parish livestock show in January...And that ran without a hitch. We just have busy times of the year. I mean, like right now we’re trying to have our first club meetings in September and then at the end of the month we have our first huge event which is the week-long fair...And that’s a big event that takes preparation...Whenever show season starts in January we go – the last Saturday in January is a parish show and then that next Monday is when we go to district and then they have off a week and then we go to state...And so you’re very, I’m very busy during that time and towards the end of the year when we have achievement day and all that stuff. That is a busy time...Record books. That’s a busy time. Then when the summer months come we sort of relax but this summer we went to 4-H camp, came home for a weekend, went to 4-HU which is a short course...Came home for a weekend. Then I went to Horse district shows so, three solid weeks I was gone.”

- **Respondent 4**

“...you don’t have any 4-H background you would drown. You would sink...I was like what? What is this? I had no idea. And none of that is ever taught or ever...job specific not, you know, when I was hired, new agent orientation pretty much I could tell you we needed volunteers and I learned what the big M was and that was all very important things. You know, I say that and that is so important but when you are just hired and you have all this thrown at you and you’re looking at a calendar and because most of the time you go down and you’re like what is this? What does this mean? What is this? You know, I think some agents are hired and they don’t really realize, “No, you’re working on Saturdays. You’re doing programs. You’re working at night. You have meetings at night... when I was first hired I didn’t have my master’s when I was first hired. So I immediately went back to school to LSU. So that too, some of us agents we were new. I mean of course I was old but I mean we were new, we would collaborate in class and like some of the things they would say were like, “Oh my God you thought you knew you had to do this?” And I was like, yeah but I have 4-H background...Right and I think some of them when they’re hired sometimes – and I was very fortunate because XXXX was great. But sometimes when you’re hired and you do have a co-worker, they don’t mix well... And sometimes I think, you know, when I was first hired at 4-H another big thing with agents were numbers, numbers, numbers. You had to bring so many to this and so many to that. I never had to worry about that...Because my kids just do. We don’t have anything else to do. You know, I think agents get caught up in that sometimes.”

- **Respondent 5**

“...agent orientation that they throw so much stuff at you all at once, you don’t really know what it is until you get out in the field...So a lot of that I think was kind of wasteful but I think they’ve corrected a lot of that. I think the orientation’s now are not as, you know, they

break them up kind. They don't throw as much at you right at the beginning...In the orientation. I mean you still have your job responsibilities but they know you've got to get started with club meetings and activities and this but ...You don't really have a clue what you're actually getting into in your parish until you get here...Because they don't, they never tell you. You're going to be working, you know, two or three weekends a month but if you're not at those activities then, you know, you're expected to be...Like livestock shows...You know, they tell you get a volunteer, get a volunteer but your livestock people expect their agent to be there...Your cookery people expect your agent to be at those area things. So yeah, it's a lot, it's a lot more after hours work than I ever dreamed...you kind of have to pick and choose I guess. You know, our regional coordinator says you can't do everything or you're going to burn out. And I think that's what has happened to a lot of our, we've lost a lot of agents that have started with me...Burn out...They're getting jobs that pay more and they're not pulled away from their families as much...I couldn't have done this with kids, younger kids...There's no way...Time management, just figuring out what's, you know, the different needs for different schools. You pick a program focus or whatever and, you know, try to follow that but like the private school's needs may be different from the public school's needs...You figure it out on your own or you call your regional coordinator or another agent...or the mentor. You know, the mentor's another agent but usually I think the mentor deal is kind of supposed to be for your first year...I would always go back to the first one if I had any questions because she was, she'd done it forever and ever and she's had wonderful ideas and been wonderful...But there are not a lot of those people around I don't think...There's some in our region but, you know, the regional coordinator can usually help you or find help or even other. When you've been around a couple of years you can call, you know agents from other...From meetings and what not and a lot of them have a lot of good

ideas...people are sharing their programs and ideas through the internet... sometimes it's hard getting in the schools because they've got to get so many educational minutes in the day and the discipline problems at the public schools here. Sometimes it's just really hard. The principals are very supportive but it's just kind of hard to get them...you just have to go in and out enough to where you catch them...It may be 7:15 or 3:40 or, you know, rarely during the day you might get a few minutes out of them. Also they're very supportive of the program but they're just torn in so many directions...we have kids that show beef animals at district, state, state fair, and then I have kids that go to XXXX. I'm expected to be at the XXXX show...and I don't know that much about livestock but they want you there for support and I do go. I go every, I couldn't go one year cause of challenge camp, but you can't be two places so you kind of have to figure where are most of your kids and go that direction...or leave one and go to the other. So it's kind of crazy sometimes...I mean there's been lots of people that have left since I started...I don't know. I think possibly but I think these people are leaving mainly because of just too much and no pay raise and...They're finding jobs that they're successful at and they're getting a whole lot better pay and less time. You know, most of these people have families...And they don't want to work every weekend, or three weekends of the month. And I think people that work on the weekends tend to feel like they need to be at the office from 8 to 4:30 too. I know I do. I mean I don't think because I'm working Friday and Saturday. I mean maybe leave an hour early here or there but I think you think you're expected to be here. And I think, you know, their families, you know, some of them have had new babies and I think that's been a big deal. They want to, so I think the last one that just quit was going to work in an ag program and was going to get. He told me eight thousand dollars more and summers off. Or work until noon in the summer for six weeks. So that's about like being off."

- **Respondent 6**

“I would sit there and try to figure something out first and if I couldn’t find it on the internet or if I couldn’t on our intranet or knew somewhere to look for it I’ll ask the question... You know, I was just fortunate enough to know who to ask and had excellent co-workers where I could count on them and if they said, “Well you may need to call so-and-so.” So, you know, they would know who to contact so I would contact that person directly... So if you had had the mentor for the longer period of time you would want that mentor to call in certain situations if they didn’t know. Where you could call them... say, if they’re not in-house with you.”

- **Respondent 7**

“I’m finally learning everything with this job... they just kind of throw you out here with this job. And it’s like, you can do whatever you want, teach whatever you want and you’re first fresh out of college and you’re like please tell me what I’m supposed to do. So she helped me with that... So I can do whatever I want, teach what – yeah, just figure it out... Well, it seems like now I ask less and less questions because I’m finally figuring it out. It takes you a good two to three years at this job because every day is different, every month is different. You teach something different every month of your entire job. It’s just different every day. But those differences come around once a year... Right when you figure it out it changes... I think I would have made a lot of mistakes the first year, but I will say too, it was kind of hard to grow when you have somebody here too that’s already been doing it for a long time. There were so many things she was doing that I never even knew. But if I was the only agent, I would have figured it out if it wasn’t turned in on time. I’m so thankful that I had that, but I maybe feel like I would have learned more if I had been just put out there... because it’s a lot.”

- **Respondent 8**

“I mean I’m looking back five years...and turnover rates of agents and that kind of thing. You know, the girl I first mentored she’s still with the XXXX; I still kind of check in on her. We’re in different regions now so I can’t go visit her...It’s for me personally because I was invested in her and wanting her to succeed. I don’t know if that’s everyone’s perspective but for me personally...For me it’s because I love my job and I want others to get the support because we need support as agents to be successful, from each other...Because of the amount of work. Because as an agent there’s no rule book to it you know...you get the unexpected and so to have someone to go to and be like, did you have this happen to you? You know, how did you deal with it or what do you think? ...for me that helps a lot...I would say to be a resource to the new agent, to provide, I don’t know but I want to say like stress management...you know, to be able to be there for them...And to help the transition into being a new agent...Because like I said it’s, there’s a lot of unknown things and so to help them into the transition of being an agent and like I said, “The end result should be for them to be successful.”...Just learning all the ins and outs of it. Like I said, “It’s a wonderful job and it’s a very fulfilling job but it’s, there’s no rule book,” like you do this first, you do this second. You know, it’s not – and every parish in the state’s different; their program...And in terms of how they do things and what contests they do. You know just simple things like that. So I think it’s, the unknown is what makes it stressful...I grew up in 4-H, more active on the parish level than any other level...I knew this is what I wanted to do...Definitely...a lot different being on the other side of that fence. You’re in charge of everything now...the third year is when you really feel like you have a handle on most aspects of the job...I keep saying this but just because it’s so big and...no rule book and you really for me – people will tell you things but I’m the type of person where I need to experience it and then wrap my head around it...And then I start to feel like this is what it’s about or, you know,

experience...like the program development stuff. The essential elements in 4-H. There's four of those that we cover in programming...Age appropriateness, club meetings and how to do those...And how to write lessons and that kind of stuff...because there is rhyme to the reason, you know...Sometimes it doesn't look like there is but it really should have a purpose and be well thought out...our reporting systems, our performance evaluations that we turn in at the end of the year. That is a yearlong report that you turn in...in July. Those things, I would assume new agents need help on...even though it's overwhelming and tough and all those negative things, but they really want to be an agent. I was at a new agent orientation which is all the new agents within a year's time. They meet and there was a lot of negativity around the room. Like it was kind of crazy...They have different pieces of the overall training about programs. This one was focused on program development. So it was like ages and stages and learning styles and that kind of stuff and it was really depressing...From the new agents...Most were under a year from just looking and knowing them...I think it's because just getting through your first year is just hard...It is challenging.”

### **Meaning Unit #3**

**“Were You Assigned a Mentor When You First Started? How Was The Mentor Assigned? What Was It Like When This Relationship First Began? How Has the Mentoring Relationship Worked? Helped? Changed?”**

- **Respondent 1**

“I was assigned a mentor. She was the one that I would have picked, too...I've seen my mentor not very many times. I've been here a year. I went to her office one time, and I went to a club meeting with her once just to see what she was up to. And then one time I actually went over there to help her with a program that, you know, she had gotten several agents to come around and see. And that was really good that I got to see that. It was something cool that, you know, I would like to implement, you know, in my program. And she's come here one time, but

she and my co-worker are best friends so she spent more time with her than she did me. Every once in a while if I have a question I'll send her an e-mail and probably about once every three months she'll call me and just see how I'm doing. But that's pretty much the extent of my experience with her...I feel like my mentor has been an asset to me. Sometimes I wish she had been there a little bit more. I guess I could have reached out to her more, but I guess the independence in me didn't really want to but, you know, she will call me every once in a while and just see how I'm doing. However, as I said, it would have been nice over this past year, you know, if she would have maybe kind of helped me a little bit more. You know, I'm thankful for what I've had from her...Every time I have e-mailed her or called her she has gotten back to me and given me as much or more information than I needed. One specific time I can think of is I had a question about 4-H University and I e-mailed her and she sent me all sorts of information and check lists and, I mean, she was a big help. So she's helped me when I've called on her. That's just about the extent of it."

- **Respondent 2:**

"My regional coordinator sent me an e-mail right after I started and said your mentor will be...and that's how that worked...I've actually had two since I started because my first mentor, she left, she got another job...Out of 4-H...she got another job with the Federal Government...The USDA I think. So once she got that job they assigned me another mentor. So the girl they assigned me originally, we had a real good connection because she – I'm doing a lot of livestock work and that's what she did a lot of and so everything that I needed for the last livestock show season; every time I had a question I just called her. She was the best help with being able to send me information and answer my questions like right on the spot and then she left right before the livestock show started and they assigned me another mentor and he's further away. He's about two hours, he's down in XXXX or XXXX Parish...so it's like two hours from

the office to there. So we unfortunately, haven't really had a lot of face-to-face interactions, not as much as I think I would have like to...I think it's been good but I think it or I know it could have been better...I think in theory it's been a good idea but it's just not as good as it could have been. ... well I think that time and distance kind of go along together you know. If I had someone that was the next parish over then it would be easier to fit in the time to do it because you don't have to include an hour and a half or two hours driving each way...You can make the times for things. You can definitely make time for things with some good advance planning but it's talking about the whole day, it's a lot harder to do that to take a couple of hours in the morning and a couple of hours in the afternoon, you know, and go see my mentors program or go see what he's doing today, you know...I think that it's impossible to do it or nearly impossible to do it with the way that me and my mentor are now, how far apart we are... The distance I think has affected our relationship between me and my current mentor because it's with tight travel dollars and now that has come true because ...our travel dollars are tight so going, you know, taking an hour and a half or two hours to drive down there and drive back, you know, is that really a priority that we need to be spending our travel dollars on when we have to go everywhere else for 4-H Club meetings, farm meetings ... But sometimes with the mentor I think that, like going there and seeing how they run their events I think is a whole lot more beneficial than having a phone conversation or SKYPE conversation or, you know, because you get to actually see what they're doing and how they're doing it, you know, and I think there are always new ideas to be gained from watching how other people do the same job that you are doing...knowing that especially because the guy who is my mentor has been here a while and knowing that he is still enthused about the job and can still do the job well and I think that gives me some confidence as well as some get up and go and get it done."

- **Respondent 3:**

“About the first month of employment...they said...here’s the girl...XXXX going to be your mentor...I think it was an e-mail initially....but I was given two livestock mentors. One didn’t have a choice; she was my best friend so...I made her my mentor, but the other two that assigned to me, one was a livestock mentor and one was not. She did like the nutrition...side of it...Whenever my 4-H regional director assigned me a mentor she assigned me XXXX...And I said, “Okay that’s fine but any livestock questions I have I’m going to call XXXX,” who was her coworker...And she said, “Oh that, I wasn’t even thinking about that.” She said, “I should have assigned you a livestock one.” So then she assigned me to XXXX...So at any point in time all three of them were on the list. For livestock questions I went to XXXX just because it was easier...I already had the relationship with her. I only met with XXXX once. We met and went over a few of not even what I part of my 4-H job, but like the paperwork side of it...She was going over how we do our evaluations and giving me tips and pointers on that...And that’s basically all we talked about. I didn’t have any questions for her so. The other mentor...I haven’t met with him. I e-mailed him and called him a few times if I had a question and that was it. We met once since I have been employed... With the technology of e-mails and a telephone...I don’t feel that I need to see her face to face to have a meeting... It’s kind of up to us...There’s no protocol like you need to meet this many times...You need to...do this...Most of the problem solving we do...on a local level right here and if it’s something we can’t handle we go XXXX (regional coordinator). Well, if I drove to her office, it’d be about an hour and fifteen minutes...That is why we meet in XXXX, but it was still further for her...We met at the coffee shop. She brought her computer...every year we have to create a portfolio of our year as a 4-H agent. This is what we did and that’s what we’re evaluated based on...And when we met it was when we were starting to work on that and that’s something that was so extensive I didn’t want

to bother her. She had things to do and she already knows how to do her portfolio. So . . . she kind of went over that and then I talked to her when we were in the process of doing the portfolio like what do you put under this section kind of thing...But that's just like typical kinds of stuff...She's busy, I'm busy...Her events are different than mine. I mean, I guess she could have come to one of my events and said well, you know, this is what I think would be better, but to be perfectly honest with you it's kind of like a take it or leave it. I don't have to do what she says if I think that's not appropriate for my parish. But even if I was assigned a livestock person, which I was...It's just . . . every parish is different. His parish doesn't work like mine.”

- **Respondent 4:**

“About a week or two after I started I got an e-mail from my regional coordinator that these were my mentors. I actually had two...at first was intimidated...because I was like what is this?...Because I didn't even know, I got an e-mail saying these are your two mentors...it was two agents from the same parish. So then I was like what is this?...At the time I had a co-worker...So of course as soon as I got the e-mail I ran to her and said, “What is this?” So she kind of explained to me what that was. I didn't even know what this was...at first I was very intimidated because it was two agents that I know were very highly looked upon. So I was like okay are they going to be watching me at everything I do?...I got their names and that was it. They would contact me. So about maybe three or four days later I got a call from a regional coordinator saying okay this is what that means. And I was like, okay. Before that I had talked to some other agents who were hired with me in our class...And they only had one. So that kind of scared me...Am I that bad, you know, are they thinking I might not do a good job? I mean to have two...Yes, like everything was racing through my head. I was like wow, what is this? And the two agents I had met before because I was a volunteer leader...Fifteen years before...So I was at some of the things they were at and they were very micromanaged, like I was very

worried about them just being – like me having to turn stuff in to them and . . . I didn't know what my expectations were. I kind of went in blind...Have two and everybody else just had one. And then a couple of people even like my coworker when she found out who they were. Not necessarily who they were but they were both from the same parish, both from the same and they had been there numerous years. It wasn't like she thought maybe they were getting experience as to you know maybe they just wanted to . . .we didn't even know. So of course she kept telling me don't worry about it, don't worry about it, don't worry about it. And I said, "Yeah, it's easy for you to say." So I went and met with my regional coordinator. She kind of explained everything and I questioned why do I have two and she just said, "Oh, just there's not even a reason. I really don't even know." But at the time, we were still full-staffed so a lot of parishes had two agents. So, and she thought maybe if they shared the responsibility it might not be as much on one as the other. So then I got nervous. Okay they are going to like going to have to be, I don't even know. My coworker kept saying do not worry about that. They're just there; they can't, you know, make or break you. So I was kind of told the role of mentors and if I had questions . . .my coordinator, my regional coordinator...But they were in a parish that was an hour and forty-five minutes away from me so we either – if I needed something it would either have to be through a phone call or an e-mail...And then we met with my mentors. We had a regional meeting. So we met and, you know, they put my mind at ease. No big deal you know whatever. They basically said, "We want you to send us, like your calendar and things you have but we're never going to be able to come." And I'm like, and they're like well you can come see some of the things that we do. And I'm thinking one hour and forty-five minutes to go watch you do club meeting. I never heard from them until the rest of that whole year...They never came to see anything I did. I never went to see anything they did...I think part of it was distance.

But I do think part of it was because I had a co-worker. . .who had been there and was a good 4-H agent. So I think they may have known that but certainly I'm going to go to my co-worker before I go to them...And for the first year I was there and my co-worker and I did everything together...We did all of our meetings together just so I would be familiar with it...Which worked out because once I was there for like eight months she took an internship in the state office...So it was really a good thing that she and I had done everything together. And 4-H was kind of old school for me...I was the leader and all that. I had been to camps already as a volunteer. I had been on trips as a volunteer so nothing was really new to me except like the paperwork stuff and that kind of thing...But I never went to my mentors for anything...One time I remember one of them mentioned, we were at some kind of training, and she said, "I guess you're doing all right, huh?" I was like yeah, I'm doing fine. So I don't know if it's because I had such a good engine in my pouch already that . . .not that I didn't need because I did, but I just went to XXXX for everything...And she taught me...Well she was next door...and after you go through a year with your mentors you have a meeting and it was my mentors, myself, my PC...and my regional coordinator and we met at a central location and it's basically paperwork. I had no problems with her, does she have any...It was like I got into the year thing...we signed some paperwork...so we had the one year thing and that was it. So I worried for nothing because it was nothing...And we kind of sat in front of the regional coordinator and, I mean, she knew. Obviously she knew I hadn't seen anything they did, you know... The agents, one of the agents I think he's my age the other one was like; she's like three or four years younger than me. I think the intimidation from me was I knew that they were good agents. So I was like are they going to be micromanaging? I guess not knowing, nobody sit me down saying, "Oh, no, it's okay, don't worry about that, you know, they're only here to help you."...I was never really told

that they can only help you here. You know, I'm thinking, oh my God, they're watching everything I did and after two months you know I was like, "Oh I forgot I even had mentors." You know?...And then I was, I don't even know if I had my final meeting and I got a phone call from my regional coordinator if I wouldn't mind being a mentor...for an agent. And I said well I don't mind but you do know, I think I had only been there only nine months. I said, "You do know I've even," no that's okay. But by that time we had started losing agents...But with her, you know, I was like okay I've got to do a better job. You know at least I'm here. You know, what can I do? She did have a co-worker. But she was real young; a new agent freshly out of college...4-H background as far as being a member and being parts of different things. So we had a little meeting. I had to go to my first meeting...my regional coordinator wanted to be there. So I went and you know we did the whole professional stuff. And you know, I stayed after and I said, "XXXX, that was her name, if you need anything don't," like I tried to tell her some things that were really overwhelming for me and that if XXXX wouldn't have been there I would have panicked. Like our whole portfolio...I felt like it's going to be horribly overwhelming. You're going to think that you're drowning but really it's not that bad; therefore, if I can do anything; you know, we exchanged phone numbers. I said, "Please don't hesitate to call me," and I did send her, I tried to send her e-mails about once every two weeks just "Hey, how are you doing?"...But she did have a co-worker too...So, I mean, paperwork wise but I don't really know if programming wise they could have helped me... There was a little packet just run off and stapled. And it was like, you went through some things. Like when I was the mentee we didn't; however, for XXXX we would do like little three and four month meetings...Where we went through that packet but it was nothing that she – did she do a good job? You know, it was nothing like that. I more of just like read through it okay, read through it;

just going through the motions. Something we had to do...every three to four months...But keep in mind they were kind of having a few problems with mine. So I don't know if that made a difference or not."

- **Respondent 5:**

"I think shortly after they hired me the regional coordinator said, you know, such and such is going to be your mentor and it was an agent that had been there for years and years and she was wonderful. She would share things with me over the internet and I went to her office I think one time before it was time to do a reporting...portfolio. However, you know, it was three hours away. So I didn't spend a whole lot of time with her. I would have loved to have been at her meetings and that sort of stuff but there's just no time...No time and the time, you know, when you first started you were going to this training, that training, service learning, new agent orientation, LSU orientation. It was just bam, bam, bam and you certainly didn't have time to go spend the day with an adult when you needed to be doing all this other stuff...Then, you know, trying to schedule meetings but ...They gave me a mentor who had the same kind of parish but then she resigned shortly after so that didn't work...So then I just figured it out, I guess on my own...They just decided she was too far away and they wanted to kind of match me with somebody closer that had a similar type parish but then she was a nice person but not very effective ...and resigned or was asked to resign. I'm not sure what happened...and well that regional coordinator left. You know, it's just kind of... shifting gears and different people so ...I think it can be effective but I didn't have that great of an experience with it and I guess it's because it was just kind of shifting and changing and ...I don't know how great of a mentor I've been but I always tell her to call me...I got a list of things, you know, suggestions for the mentor but I don't know if there was any follow up or actual meeting or evaluating of the mentor and the relationship and stuff. I don't know if that's just kind of floating out there or what...She never

came here...Just went and met with her. You know, she shared some things with me and I think it was we were getting ready for the centennial celebration she had something or she was lending me some things to decorate with and then we went into the portfolio and she showed me some. It was time, almost reporting time...Yeah, see I started in January so I mean in May I still had to do something April, so it was spring when I saw her...I didn't go probably until April...March or April...She kind of showed me, you know, how to report...you just have to report your meetings and your numbers and what, you know, I had that information but I didn't know how to actually ...put it. We had had maybe one training and she kind of showed me one of her old ones and said this is what – so I kind of looked at that, looked at some of her activities and programs that she was doing...The state reporting thing was kind of what she was showing me online. Yeah she was very supportive and very helpful and I mean if I called her, she doesn't work here anymore but if I called her right now she would...Mentor yeah... The second one was very helpful when you talked to her, but very hard to get in touch with. You know, if I saw her in person very, you know, at regional things. Very helpful and oh yeah call me and, but never got through...Yeah and I think there were some issues going on in her life and the next thing I knew she was gone so...With the first one even though the distance was...she was a better agent...She was more effective even though the second one had the same kind of kids just poverty, you know rural...But the first one had, you know, some city kids and, you know, all different kinds...The higher educated and, but the second one, you know, never really followed through...I mean I would call and not get back and, you know, usually when she'd see me she's say oh I'm sorry, you know, such and such been busy or whatever. Her husband lived somewhere else and, you know...She was juggling children and whatever. She had a lot on her

plate but, you know, maybe she knew she wasn't going to be there for a very lengthy time I don't know...in the big picture it was very, very helpful.”

- **Respondent 6:**

“I was hired and I worked which actually when you told me this was about mentoring I was like oh, okay. I was hired and I went to her last club meeting of the year...And then she left the XXXX...and was just never assigned another mentor after that...And I went to her last club meeting in April, if I'm not mistaken and then she left in May...we talked over the phone and I actually went to her office once and we talked a little bit and then I went to her last group of club meetings on a day...I needed to learn how, what the procedures were, the parliamentary procedures of how the 4-H ran and stuff like that so that's what I went to that meeting for...No, I don't know how long she had worked for the Ag Center but everybody had said that she was real good and she, you know, her meetings were structured real good and when I went there they were. They were structured really good. But she left and she's something within the school system in XXXX...I have no idea. Unless, you know, my regional coordinator realized that I was the type that if I needed help with something I was going to ask for it, knew that I had a lot of contacts; I don't know.”

- **Respondent 7:**

“The 4-H regional coordinator assigned them. So it must have been about three months after I was hired because she didn't even get here until – we didn't have one from July to September. So I'm guessing when she got there in September is when I got one... they said that they do it based on – I don't know if it is interests or whatever but somebody that they think would fit personality wise with you that you would get along with and has kind of the same focus as you or whatever...I am lucky here in this parish because there is another 4-H agent. A lot of people only have one. So, I have a mentor here that's built in, but this other one was in XXXX

and she gave me fresh ideas that had never been done here before...So it was a good balance... I wish I would have gone to more stuff with her...I have club meetings here and we have a lot of clubs here so it was really hard for me to work around my schedule to be able to go to her stuff, too...And she did ask me a few times and I went to judge things for her. And that was really good to be able to see how she runs her contests and stuff...So, I judged her demonstrations and then I judged something else, too... Somebody that I bounced ideas off of, that helped me. I could pick up the phone. I wasn't afraid to call her. It wasn't like it was a weird relationship. It came natural, I guess. I don't know but I can talk to anybody...Yes. She's the type that likes to help. She's a helper so she enjoyed that kind of stuff. I can see why some people aren't just meant to be mentors. You have to have that personality.”

- **Respondent 8:**

“It was a very short relationship because the agent that was mentoring me took another job outside of the XXXX...We probably only met one or two times face to face and then I would call her on occasion but ... the regional coordinator kind of explained what the mentor was, you know, that they were there to help me and ...when I was a mentor, I asked about some guidelines and stuff and got some...from my regional coordinator...I brought it with me...Yeah and it's just called mentoring guidelines and it talks about requirements, procedures, mentor visits, mentor do's and don'ts, mentee's dos and don'ts. So I used this in my first mentoring role with the first agent that I helped...That was in late 2007, early 2008...And it's just broken down requirements and procedures and then the mentor visits? ...it has a check list of things and how many times you need to visit them and that kind of thing. One thing I do notice about these mentoring guidelines is there's no real objective of the mentoring process in here...It tells us what to do but doesn't tell us the expectations of... the program...I think for me, you know, when my mentor left and no one replaced her and I wasn't fully – it's supposed to be like a year-long time of

having a mentor. And they didn't replace her so that was kind of, you know, it would have been helpful...I mean we worked together with other things but in an official like mentor, mentee visit, two or three times...She did, she arranged it...Called me and through e-mail too...Just introduced herself as the mentor and then scheduled a meeting and then, you know, met again following that initial meeting...for me I wasn't from that area of the state at all...And so to feel like someone cared about me, you know, me fitting in and welcoming me to that region and that kind of thing.....I guess the greatest thing would be that I could call and vent and I trusted her enough to know that it wouldn't be repeated or, you know...so in that short time frame... I guess I just felt like if she took the time to meet with me outside of work and come from her office to my office, I guess I just felt a comfort there with her.”

#### **Meaning Unit #4**

**“Who Did You Turn To When You Had Questions? Did You Find You Have Formed Any Informal Mentoring Relationships? What Kind Of Information Did They Provide For You? Did You Find Someone Who You Thought Would Be Great At Mentoring or Helping You With This Job? If So, How Did You Choose That Person?”**

#### **• Respondent 1**

“XXXX’s been a kind of an unofficial mentor to me...She has been very, very supportive of me. She knew what I had to work with as far as the programs. She knows what’s going on in my office and she knows the difficulties I have here. And she has been nothing but supportive. In fact, when I first came here and was having significant issues with my co-worker she actually kind of came to my rescue one day. She drove from the regional office and she kind of sat my co-worker down and kind of just said look this is your role this is not your role. This is what you need to do. This is what you don’t need to do with XXXX. And she has, she’s been wonderful. So and she has coached me, she’s cheered me on and that’s a very – people say stuff is invaluable and that sounds really degrading but it’s really not, I mean, I couldn’t put a value on

the way that XXXX has coached me and cheered me on. Even though, you know, XXXX is my mentor technically XXXX has been a really good role for that for me...My mom has been a mentor to me...My mom, she was a great agent...And she loved what she did and she had great ideas and she was one that if I wanted to do a program and I couldn't figure out what to do it on I'd be like, mom come on...So she has been yet another informal mentor but she's my mother and she's kind of a mentor with life anyway but it was a great resource to have and in fact a lot of the books I have on my shelves...All of those came from my mom...everything came from my mom; so I've had good resources..."

- **Respondent 3**

"To be perfectly honest, the first person I'm going to ask is XXXX because she's sitting right there and she's been doing this for 19 years...you know, each parish works differently. She knows how things work in this parish so, I go to her...To be perfectly honest with you, we're so busy like that's low on the totem pole...That's why I go to her most of the time. It's the easiest and quickest solution. I don't have to wait for an e-mail response or try to call anybody. I know that's not what they really want me to do because they want me to have an outside view besides, you know, let's see how other people do things in other counties...And anytime we have like a district livestock show all the agents are sitting around, we can talk about, you know, kind of have a pow-wow on how do you do this or how you handle this situation and stuff like that. So I guess that's probably the most valuable mentors whenever we're just sitting around...Most of the problem solving we do...on a local level right here and if it's something we can't handle we go to XXXX (regional coordinator)...Just because of my personality, I'm going to go out and find who I think is the best person to answer that question regardless of...if the mentor is in the next building or not, On top of the assigned mentor we have, in the first year of employment, we have orientation just as an (unclear) employee whether you're 4-H, horticulture, ANR, or whatever.

And then there's just for 4-H agents, there are new agent orientations that we have to do...And we have to do three within the first year...And those sessions, they all have a different topic. It's a day and a half on whatever topic. For example, one was on volunteerism, one was on empowering youth and things like that... those sessions also answer some unanswered questions that you might have that you don't need to ask the mentor because they just told you...how you should handle the situation and stuff like that. Like a bunch of the problem solving, that was the last session that we had. You have a parent that does this; you have a kid that's threatening suicide. What do you do with all these crazy situations? I find that the informal time that we spend together just...human beings. Right, you are not really working during that time. You're just visiting while you're waiting on kids to come from this event or something like that...That's the time where we can say, how did you handle this?"

- **Respondent 4**

"I think me having a co-worker helped. I think having a co-worker was extremely, extremely beneficial...And her being a good one...having XXXX helped me...I don't really think about it anymore until you came to me and said, "Can I interview you about mentoring?" I thought like, mentoring, oh, wow. I don't know if it's just something that we have to go through the motions. This is something that is on the computer; it says we have to do it so we're doing it...It may have changed but when I did it, what purpose does it serve? Like...nine times out of 10 if you have a co-worker you can go to your co-worker. And if you don't have a co-worker you usually go to somebody who's kind of your friend now. You know...who's nearby...because like some of these even before when budget wasn't so bad, you know, neighboring counties, the agents ride together to like quarterly trainings or you know...So we talk you know, in there. So that was kind of mentoring, collaborating type thing...Because, you know, they laugh but I always say this, "There is no need to reinvent the wheel." If you're doing

it, sorry sister, I'm taking it...It may not work in my parish but if I think it is I'm surely going to try it...I might have to change some things or change some wording but . . .so I think that is a part of mentoring without being called mentoring. And I think a lot more of that was done way back when...Because now there are not really any new agents in my area. So now when we ride together with stuff, all we do is complain. . .we are venting, you know...But I think back then we did more of, you know, well what is your program this year?...And so we kind of talked and I'd say, "Oh, I did that right, you know, hoping it was funny, you know. . .And I might say, "Well tell me some of the stuff you did." Now to me that was mentoring. That was sharing ideas but it was mentoring...And even now, new things that are introduced to us like surveys all the time...And there's no right or wrong answer. There are several of us in our little area who get together and say, "What are y'all putting for this?"...So I think that's mentoring. I don't know if it's mentoring or if it's just friendship. You know, I think that still goes on... Some of them do because that's their, their comfort. You know their protector type thing. You know and I think all of our regional coordinators except maybe for one have been 4-H agents. So they know what we're going through on a day-by-day basis. You know, they know how much time, if we put it on paper we're probably making two cents an hour...I think the regional coordinators have done better. Like you know, they kind of ask us for our quarterly trainings. What do y'all want? What do you need? ...You know, we take these little surveys. What would you like seeing presented? ...I mean really, I don't need to hear again about the big M. You know, you take a class on that. You know, don't waste my time all day with that...So I think that's mentoring us...When we had our agent convention and everybody's sitting around and talking at night...And when you go to our agent convention, agent's present things. You know, I did two presentations. Well you know, I'd rather go sit and listen to somebody who's a 4-H

agent...Right, so I think that is our mentoring. I do think a lot is done informally without even realizing well that's mentoring. I got more from talking to you than riding four hours to a meeting...then my mentors the whole year...I think too sometimes we hire people, like lately we've hired a couple of agents from out of state...I think sometimes they bring stuff in and I'm like you know, I'm fascinated to just listen. I'm like that's what y'all call 4-H? That's not 4-H, you know? ...And they're the same way. Like there's an agent in XXXX Parish. I think she's been here a little over a year... I feel like we talk a lot and I'm fascinated to listen to like her whole, what do you think about this type thing? ...she is just fascinated...she's like, well what is that... Like just different things I do in my parish and she's like...I would love to do that and I'm like you can't do that in your parish. You know that would never work in your parish. So to me that's mentoring. I'm learning from her because, you know, sometimes she'll things and she's like but that wouldn't work and then I'll say yeah but if we kind of put a little twist on it, it might. You want new things; you don't want your program to get stale. So I think that...we kind of collaborate as she brings a whole different twist to the table...talk and all...I think it goes back to just visiting...Because as much as you say we're not talking about work, that's all we talk about...That's our...common ground...it's just like any profession; even teaching. We get together at like at Christmas parties or whatever end of the year. Okay nobody talks about work and 20 minutes into it we're talking about something so to me the sharing is – I learn more from that than probably anything else...Yeah, any training...any exposure to things...And a lot, I mean 90 percent of our agents when you say – like I was saying, “Oh that sounds like a good idea I would like that.” Two or three days later you know I'm getting the e-mail with all the stuff; you know, here use it that type thing...Because you know, and I do the same thing, we just share our stuff...Your secretary can be your mentor, because she can straight up tell you this is

what they did last year. You know and mine was very good about not that you have to do it like that. No give me a guide, give me some kind of starting point.”

- **Respondent 5**

“There was another agent that was here and she was working with me a little bit and then she got changed to FCS but I did a lot of the stuff the way she did it...And then gradually, you know, made some changes...So we kind of did, she did her cookery this way and, you know, one year she had a commodity cookery and it was all commodities and I thought well, you know, maybe if we do two contests we’ll get more involvement because if you can’t make one for some reason then maybe can some – we started that and so I do two now; one in October and one in November and that way you can get more participation and if a kid’s going to participate in both they don’t have to make five different, you know, four dishes one night...Little things like that but I kind of followed what she was doing...when she was here and then just kind of added or she would tell me, “You’re doing too much. You need to slow down because you’re going to burn out; you’re going to burn out.” And I know now...because she was really laid back and nothing worried her and I kept thinking, “We need this, we need that,” and I kind of came in trying to do it all... I was gosh almost 50 when I started as 4-H agent so. You know, I look at some of these agents, some of these young agents that are my children’s age. You know, and that’s what kind of blew me away. I’m thinking, I’m working with you? You’re my kids age. You know, it was kind of funny. The little agent from XXXX used to call me grandma and I said don’t do that. You can call me mama but not grandma. I’m not a grandma yet...and they come to you sometimes, those younger ones every now and then I guess, but, you know, I’ll even got to them. You know some of the younger ones that have good ideas that doesn’t, age doesn’t bother me...I just tell them I look old, I’m not really old, I’m young I just look old. I just wrinkled, sun damaged skin, but I’m not really old... the interaction with the other agents...You

just kind of gel...I got to be good friends with two agents. I guess through some of these meetings. But those are the ones that'll call you or that you kind of communicate with...I think it's just personalities...Yeah, like I mean the XXXX agent. Somebody laughed and said they thought we knew each other before...You know, after a couple of months. Well haven't y'all known each other? And I said "No not until we started." Because, you know, just personality I guess...And she's a lot younger than I am...I'll say I can't find such and such send it to me...She'll say okay and they she was looking for something the other day and she couldn't find it. Send me that, what are you doing? You've got a registration form for such and such camp you doing. Send me a couple I'll change it up to work in my parish...we do a lot of that...And certain people. It's kind of funny but certain people, one agent in particular will share with someone she likes...but she's not going to put it out there for everybody...It's kind of interesting I'm the one she likes so I'm glad...But, you know, if anybody asked me for anything I'll be glad to give it to them. I'm not going to hide it because she gave it to me...But it's kind of funny. People...interesting personalities and you just kind of have to learn the way people are...Probably, three or four...Yeah, I would say three I could call, you know, morning, noon, or night...One of them is closer to my age...she's been doing this a long time and then the other two are younger but have been – one started with me and one has probably been here 10 or 12 years... And so they have a good relationship and she said, one of the one's that started with me. She said, "Don't worry about your mentor you can just use mine too."... You know like when she's got something to share I'll give it to you too...So it's kind of like, you know, I'm getting her informally. But the other one, I don't know if she's probably served as a mentor but I don't know to who. You know, the older one that's been at this for 20 something years. I don't know where or who she's mentored but I'm certain that she's probably had several...I mean assigned

several... informal mentor relationships...Not the one that you were assigned...Those one's that you started building relationships with...If they didn't know then you'd go a step higher with somebody that's been there longer. You know, sometimes it easier to ask the person that's on your level cause you don't feel so dumb...You know, somebody that was hired with you. You ask them and then if they don't know then you go to somebody that really knows. Cause, you know, at first. I mean now I don't call anybody but when you first you just don't feel as comfortable calling those people that have been doing it for so long and you don't want to make them, you know, you don't want to feel dump...Or totally lost.”

- **Respondent 6**

“So my background is I've been a volunteer for several years with 4-H so I knew the volunteer side but I didn't know the extension part of it like the ins and outs of 4-H on... right. But I had enough people that I knew in extension that if I needed help I just had to pick up the phone. Of course my co-worker, XXXX, she's been a 4-H agent for a long time...So she's helped me. XXXX, who is the parish agent here; when they didn't have an agent here he took the livestock responsibility. So if I needed any help with something like that I could contact him. So even though I didn't have a mentor assigned after she left the XXXX, I still had people that could rely on...And I'm not afraid to ask a question... you would have to talk to like my regional coordinator or whatever and find out why they didn't assign somebody else. Because I'm sure there are other people in this, in our region that is qualified to do it...But why I didn't get reassigned, I don't know...I've been here over a year and a half or so...When I got hired I got here and of course the regional coordinator came and said okay this is boom, boom, boom. This is how things are going to run your first year, you're going to have a mentor, and she's going to help you and everything. Now after my co-worker, XXXX, got over some health issues then, you know, she was here for our club, starting our club year...When school started back and

everything. So, when I walked in with her I learned everything from her from a club meeting so...So I didn't have a person that was formally titled this is your mentor. This is the first person you need to call...I didn't have that. I had several informal like you said where I just picked up the phone and call and say, "Hey." ...Yeah I just chose them because I knew them...Like well, like XXXX, she's been here for a long time...She's my resource right here. So instead of me having to call somebody I'd just walk down to her office and say hey what's this and she knows. And she helped me that way...Livestock, shooting sports . . .Anything to do with outside related; Junior leaders, stuff like that. That's mine and like here's is the cookeries and the ...And healthy living everything else...So, but she helps me, I help her. But for like livestock stuff I knew about the entry forms and everything but XXXX, he ran the program for a little while so I'd go to him...And then if it was something that was more important, you know, that he didn't know then I would call XXXX who was the beef superintendent for all the shows in Louisiana...If I didn't have like my in-house or anybody else? Is that what you're saying or in conjunction with that? ...I probably wouldn't have used it as much as in contacting her for things...Or contacting the person for things because it's right here. So I would just, me and XXXX are bad about hollering down the hall because, you know, there's one office between us so ... she just hollers down the hall and I holler back at her...Or I can walk down to her office either/or...But if it was something that if they wouldn't have known or whatever then I may have...If there's a big, big question I guess...Sometimes if they don't know then I'd go..."

- **Respondent 7**

"The reporting. Paperwork because you have to write your numbers and how many kids you reach every day and you also have to do a portfolio to be shown at the end of the year which is basically is just what you've done. So that's hard because sometimes it takes just as much time as it does going and seeing kids. That's probably the biggest challenge...And I work with

XXX city kids which are really under-privileged children. At first, I didn't really know how to deal with that at all. That was probably a big challenge a long time ago, but it's not anymore...my mentor worked in a very rural area and we are in an urban here. And that's totally different from each other in that sense...how you deal with the children is totally different. They were like, "She sent you all that stuff? I wish I got her stuff." ...Yeah, I hate it for people who didn't because they're probably lost as a goose. I would have been...Yeah and there's just so much to learn. There really is...if you haven't done 4-H in a long time, you can't remember how club meetings are. So you don't have any of the schools because I'm not from here, so. There's a ton of schools. I don't know the area at all. So I had to learn the area, I had to learn the schools. You have to build a relationship with the principals and you have to start reporting that. Then you have to put the numbers in pars and then you have to come back and sit and actually think about what you're going to do for the next month...Then you have a website to put your portfolio in which is what they evaluate you on once a year...I almost have to do my programs totally different because some of the schools are on different levels...you're basically doing different programs the same month...that's not something you figure out until you've been doing it a while. It's just a learning process. you have to be flexible. I'm just a very-go-by-the-book kind of person and I've had to totally throw that out the window. You can get to a club meeting and say you have this whole program together that you just know fits them perfectly and you can't wait to get to it and they'll go, "We have a pep rally in 15 minutes, so if you could just go over the newsletter and maybe do a few minutes of the program." And you're like, "How am I going to do a few minutes and they're not going to get this."...I just think, well, they'll give me 45 minutes; everybody's is going to give me 45 minutes. There's always something. "Hey, the water busted over there so let's meet down here," and it's like this small room with 50 kids in

there and you're about to suffocate...So flexibility is a big one that you have to learn...I think another challenge or something that I've had to learn is just you're not given a whole lot when you start. You just have to go out there and figure it out. That was really hard for me at first...Or like how you're supposed to do a club meeting or what the program is supposed to be consisted of, you know, like what do you do? And they're just like, "Well, if it needs to be about 15 minutes, just do something that you think that they'll enjoy." What if I teach them something really bad? I don't know, or wrong. So that was hard at first...I don't know if they expect you to, but they expect you to figure it out. I don't really think that the orientations were really beneficial because I never really learned still what to do...You're not crazy. It just takes you a few years. Because I'm telling you I was clueless when I first started...Yeah, but it had been 10 years since I had been in a club meeting. I didn't remember how it went...I always wanted to do the best and be the best and there's no rules; like what do you do? What's expected? What is the best? What am I supposed to model? ...And I feel like that's good in a sense because you get to kind of make it your own thing but it's hard as somebody who has never worked before to figure out."

- **Respondent 8**

"I was very fortunate in my first transition. I had about three months to follow. So I guess yes, that's why I said what I said before about the beginning of the transition to follow the agent that was retiring. And so for like three months we went to club meetings together. She taught me everything. Now obviously I formed my own opinions but some things it was nice to hear that perspective and see how it had been done... my regional coordinator just kind of filled in and really was more of a mentor...I mean that's her role too, I guess...But I would have probably selected her anyway just because I loved her and she made me a better agent...Because XXXX would come hold my hand and...you know, and encourage me and she would make me

think about things. Programming, development, you know...She would always ask me why I would do whatever program contest I was doing. She'd always be like, "Well why are you doing that, XXXX?" But it helped me think to become intentional...I think that makes you a good 4-H agent, becoming purposeful...And she was supportive of me and I could call her and she'd listen, give me her opinion."

### **Meaning Unit #5**

#### **"What Are Your Greatest Challenges In Your Position? Has Having a Mentor Helped With These Challenges? How Was Your Mentor Helpful?"**

- **Respondent 1**

"A big challenge is, "I'm excited about 4-H. I love 4-H. I'm a big promoter of the organization, but not everyone feels the way I do about it. It's been a challenge for me to get out there and let the kids know what 4-H has to offer because all they know is the person who was here for 30 years, who to them...was so uninteresting."

- **Respondent 2**

"I think prioritizing your time. Like figuring out, it's a lot. I guess just figuring out where we have to be especially on certain days we'll have three or four different meetings come up on the same day and prioritizing on what's most important of what we need to do. I think that's one of the biggest challenges and you have to be good at it and you have to be organized and you have to be willing to keep a good schedule and keep a calendar that you can follow because otherwise you're going to be totally lost ...I know that with all the budget situations and stuff there, some parishes will have two 4-H agents and some of them are only going to have one. Depends on population size and how well the program is established and everything for right now...There are three new agent orientation classes that you go through...But the very first one we went to I want to say that there was six or seven of us...Then the second class we went to

there was more that had come on-board. So there was a big, it was like 15 or 16...It was bigger, it was a bigger class...But the class that we went through with agents there was a bunch of, they were all younger agents...I don't know, I'd say younger, about in their late 20s to mid-30s like myself...That type of age group was going through...we had three times that we went to agent orientation...One of the three, one of the topics was on mentoring...And I don't know if it was the first, second, or third one. I don't remember that...We would get there about 11 o'clock or so and or 12 somewhere around there and we would go from there and we would spend the night, get up the next morning, do some more sessions and then we would be through...And we did that three times...One was basically around this time, one was in December and then one was in March or April, somewhere around there...And when we all got together that's when we had it...All sorts of topics are covered...I think one of them was on mentoring...Yeah, the people that led the sessions were either some agents ... been there for years or the regional coordinators or XXXX...I learned that it was necessary... but like I said, "I thought it was necessary part of, because there's so much stuff to learn within the XXXX," and so much ins and outs about something so when if somebody is not comfortable asking questions or whatever, they're going to get overwhelmed...And like my first experience at XXXX...We got there and, you know, I'm new, I have never been on XXXX's campus before ...and I didn't know where anything was so in my eyes a mentor should say, "Okay this is what you need to expect when you go down there." ...Boom, boom, boom. This is how things are run. Well, I didn't have anything like that...4-H camp, same thing. This is how it's going to be, this is what, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Didn't have anything like that...stuff like that helps, what to expect at camps, what to expect at contests that you're going to run and stuff, you know, stuff like that...cause my background I used to be an assistant manager for XXXX so ... my managerial

skills and stuff like that, you know, you start here and then you work up...Use your resources at hand and if that doesn't help then you jump up the ladder...And that's what I always do...I have a farm and I've got cattle and stuff on it and I was a problem solver for XXXX with the management program so, you know, I'd go to this store for a year or so...Challenges; one thing is getting information out...As in, you know, sometimes we have a good channel of people coming to do meetings and whatever but – which I'm on this committee about our web pages and stuff trying to find resources, electronic resources. It's hard...No, we because you have to click here to click this to click, you know, there is no one central wise location for something. It's all scattered...And even the internet too, sometimes. When you get outsiders when you tell them okay when you're looking for livestock stuff you click under livestock and then you have to click under livestock show office and then click under catalogs and then you click the species that you want...Challenges... it's a different type of stress...Well, XXXX it was, I can't even describe the pressure that a person was under over there...Because of you have to make sure that sales are done and you have to make sure you're area of responsibilities are clean and stocked and staffing and reports and check offs and everything else. It was, it was bad...You have paperwork and different type of reporting. Different type of productivity as in well I shouldn't say productivity. Different type of spectrum of what you're doing...You know, making sure that you have kids to 4-H University and kids to camp and 4-H day at the capital and stuff like that.”

### **Meaning Unit #6**

#### **“What Is Your Overall Attitude/Perception of Mentoring Among 4-H Youth Educators?”**

- **Respondent 1**

“I think it's very necessary. I think it's a very great asset because like I said it is a very overwhelming position to come into. For me, I grew up with my mother a 4-H agent and I knew kind of what to expect but even that it was very, very overwhelming to come in and know that

you've got 500 kids out in the parish that depend on you ever month and knowing that, you know, they're in XXXX cheering for you to make a difference in kid's lives and knowing that's on your shoulders. So it's very, I mean, it's a very overwhelming position to start in and it is necessary I think that it's something that – it's very helpful.”

- **Respondent 2**

“...when I think about it it's usually more from a negative standpoint than a positive standpoint...I mean that's just the opinion or the feeling that I've gotten from how this process works. It hasn't necessarily been a success and I think that it could be and I think that there is more that I could have gotten out of it...Yeah, I think that there could be. I think that there needs to be more guidelines and more you know maybe expectations of what they expect from the whole process and that's what really (unclear) ... Maybe to him I don't know, nothing was given to me to say that outside of, you know, that we're supposed to meet once during the first year was pretty much it. you're probably going to see that all of our experiences with the mentoring processes have been completely different...I think there is going to be some similarities there but I think because it's not a formalized, you know, step by step this is how we expect the process to work, so kind of each mentor and mentee develops their own system of how they want it to work... Now I don't think that it's essential but I do think does give by them assigning you somebody it does give you that person that you know you can contact because they know that they've been given a responsibility by their supervisor and also to make sure that their answering your questions and helping you out. So you do know that you have that person you can count on and if I call him or e-mail him, he is always a quicker response back, whereas if I was to e-mail just another co-worker to ask them a question they might not be as quick to respond back because they might want to help but they know they don't have to.”

- **Respondent 3**

“She’s not really like looking over my shoulder...None of them really like came to the events and monitored what I was doing or anything like that. It’s basically a go-to person. That’s the way I understand it...to me the only mentor that I guess thought that I needed, truly needed was somebody that could tell me about running a livestock show and the shooting sports and all that stuff that I was not familiar with. That’s quote, unquote, “My role,”...I guess it depends on the challenge. If it’s how to do something it would one of the mentors. If it’s...How to run an event or something like that...If it’s more of a – I have this parent that’s angry about this and I don’t know what to do with them...If it’s something we don’t feel comfortable handling ourselves that’s where we go to XXXX. That’s really XXXX’s position, to be like the liaison of calming the storm . . .for you a little bit; keeping it from escalating to a higher power...The hierarchy is so broken down, I mean...our immediate supervisors, our parish chair...And then above her we have our 4-H regional coordinator. And then if we need to go to above her, we have a regional director...I guess the mentors would fall under the parish chair I guess. You know, they don’t have any say so over my job, but they’re there to help...I’m very informal...So you know, I’m going to ask a question to whoever I think is the best person to ask that question to...Whether that’s my assigned mentor or not. Maybe that’s why I have so many. I don’t know...But that works for me. I really honestly don’t see the point in them assigning me one because it’s almost like, okay, that’s just one more thing I have to do. I have to go meet with this person...I guess I don’t understand the reasoning behind why they assign you a mentor...I’ll find a mentor if I need one... I mean, I understand the XXXX’s point in doing it because there are, I guess, people out there that would just sit here and try to figure it out themselves and don’t really know who to turn to; but I’m not that person...Well some agents don’t have a co-worker...Some of them are by themselves...I have a co-worker...And I get along with my co-

worker, right... There are other situations where they're not going to ask the co-worker because they don't speak... Well there's some that work this closely that don't get along... I do see the value in it; just not for me, if that makes sense... I don't see that I need it so... like for my fix is to go away... Honestly we've never talked about their mentor relationships... If it's a shy person maybe they really like it... But I'm not shy... It's just... not talked about... The few questions that I've asked her I could have asked like 50 other people the same thing... So I didn't think that she needed to be necessarily assigned to do that. Because the way I work, if somebody came to me and asked me can you go over how to do a portfolio? Sure... When's a good day, I'll meet with you; whether they are assigned to me or not... But even if you were by yourself in the office... the scheduling. You don't need a mentor for that. You schedule it when you can go to it. I mean, it's kind of common sense."

- **Respondent 5**

"I wonder if the one who I'm mentoring needs to say, you know, hey this isn't working because... See what I'm saying? ...There's no follow up or write up. It's just kind of informally done... this is what you do and this is your mentor and, you know, if you're doing it, you're doing it and if you're not doing it and she doesn't say anything well so be it... there's no kind of documentation I think that may have happened in past. But I don't know and I certainly don't want to say anything negative about our regional coordination. But I think it depends on the regional coordinator. Some of them may be doing that... And probably are. I don't know if ours is or not. They didn't, I didn't get a whole lot of that... I mean I didn't get a whole lot of feedback from the regional coordination about the mentoring program... I mean I've never asked or... I just was told she's, this is who you have, no you're not going to have this one you're going to have this one. It's kind of like we had to work it out. Nobody ever came back and said is this working, is this not working... I think it could be positive. I think it can be really good. Because,

you know, like I said a lot of ideas that I've gotten came from my first mentor that never really. She gave me up, should I say on paper but she never really quit helping me."

- **Respondent 6**

"I'm on the side that it wasn't a very positive Well, I've been kind of an informal mentor, I guess for some of these people around here... a lot of it is like livestock issues. We lost an agent out of a parish that's gone on to do something else. Well livestock responsibilities got thrown on somebody in the office and they didn't know. You know, they had a concept but they haven't done anything about entry forms or anything...So I've gone and this is state fair time. We're getting state fair entries in. So I went over to their office and sat down and went over their entry forms to make sure that everything was right and saying this is what you need to look for, for the future before they send them off. Because state fair, you send them if they're not right they send them right back to you...Well we were in the conversation that we were having and this was at our 4-H convention that we had in August...We were, in our conversation, we were kind of talking and could tell that she was kind of uncomfortable and that's when I said, "Well look, I will just come to your office on a day." ...I just went to her office and did it...if you see a co-worker that doesn't know anything and that does not have enough information about one specific topic somebody should be willing to step up and go help them...you know, especially if you get somebody that is just strictly, this is like their first job or whatever it's going to be way overwhelming...about once a week it could be just an e-mail, phone call. We don't do letters nor cards anymore but, you know, drop a card or whatever just to show, look it's okay somebody's thinking about you so forth and so on...Just the caring part of it...And then, you know, for instance if somebody calls and asks me a question about livestock; if I don't know the answer I'm going to find it and try to get back to them...And if you say that you're going to do something just make sure that you do it...if you're going to say, "Okay, well I'm going to come

to your club meeting or you can come to mine, try all possible to make sure that happens.” ...I think that a mentoring program could be a huge success and be hugely beneficial for this...if it is used correctly...But like I said, I don’t know how it works because I never really had one to show how it works...help them think things out...And, you know, everybody says, “Well you can always go back and rely on your regional coordinator.” Well that’s true to a point...honestly, I don’t know if there is a formal protocol within XXXX. I just know there’s a mentor program...they may say my mentor is and that was about it...What do they do, I don’t have no idea...Not in my circles anyway.”

- **Respondent 7**

“I think after talking with other people and their mentoring experience, mine was better just because she had constant communication with me and shared so much with me. I’ve learned how to be a good one for one day when I am one...and I would just maybe mention that I had been with mine that day and they were like, “Really, I haven’t done anything with mine,” just kind of that small talk...I think I’ve kind of always heard that, but I don’t know. There are only a few of us that were hired at the same time...Yes, we have quarterly meetings where we share things and talk about things that need to be talked about, but that’s never been a topic of conversation. Like I couldn’t even tell you who like other people in the region who their mentor is. I don’t even know...No, we were never given any guidelines or anything. She may have been, but I wasn’t...That’s the only bad thing. You’re never really given any guidelines. You just kind of figure it out...I like directions...Yeah, you’re new and you’re fresh out of college is a big difference than somebody who’s been working for five years... But like I said there are other people that have said, “So what was the point of this”, because they have never got close with theirs.”

- **Respondent 8**

“I think the possibility to form a mentor/mentee relationship even if it’s formal or informal is one of the key factors in surviving in extension as a 4-H agent... You have to have somebody that can serve as a resource, can serve as a coach, and can serve as a cheerleader; all of those things. I think our current system doesn’t allow for successful formal mentoring experiences mainly because of time I think with the mentoring agent. But I think it’s very beneficial because you’re learning from someone who may not have the exact same program as you but has been there and can offer insight and guidance”

### **Meaning Unit #7**

#### **“What Suggestions Do You Have To Improve Mentoring For 4-H Youth Educators?”**

- **Respondent 1**

“When we do communicate it’s really great and she gives me great ideas and she gives me great help. To make our mentor relationship better we would just have to communicate more even if it’s just me sending her an e-mail every week and saying well this is what I’m doing what do you think about this or how could I make this better? Or she could send me an e-mail and say hey I’m doing this program, you know, maybe you could try to do this.”

- **Respondent 2**

“I think in order for the mentoring process, at least in 4-H, to be successful, I think you’ve got to have a lot of interaction time between the two people.” “I think like a three month or a six month timeline ...I think like a three month or a six month timeline or even just after six months you know, contact the mentor and the mentee and ask them you know, “How do you think it’s going? Do you think there are any changes that need to be made?”

- **Respondent 3**

“For me I would say get rid of it, but I don’t think for other people that would be the thing. So I wouldn’t say to change it. I don’t think anything’s wrong with it. I think informality is good...Because if they made it formal, I would hate it...If they forced everybody to meet, you know once a month or something like that, I think that would be a total waste of time...So I wouldn’t change it. For me personally, I don’t think I need it but for other people I do see a value in it so...I would say don’t change it...we have enough mandatory.”

- **Respondent 4**

“I think distance has a lot, I mean your mentor has to be right there...We have to do the same kind of 4-H. We have to, you know, I think now through the years it has just got that, don’t give me another thing to do, you know? ...Right, so one night I have junior leader meeting, one night have shooting’s first meeting, one night you have you know cookery, then you’ve got your livestock meeting and then you’ve got your advisory meetings. Then I’ve got to stick in history and, you know, so do I have time to mentor somebody; probably not...But if they’re nearby it’s easier. It’s more convenient, not easier but more convenient because if we have to go to a meeting we’re going to ride together. So this is our mentoring...even if we’re 20 minutes away we can go eat lunch somewhere together...It’s not an hour and forty-five minutes. And if I’m your mentor and I said, “XXXX, I’m so sorry I just got a call from the school board and they want me to go do something at a school. Can we reschedule?” It’s a lot easier than if you and I are an hour and forty-five minutes away. Then I might have to tell my school board, “I’m sorry I have a meeting that I have to keep,” because I don’t know when I’m going to see you again...I’m thinking about even personalities. I think the agents that mentored me are a lot mellower now...And maybe it’s just that I know them better, but you know, to me I don’t want to put somebody who’s going to be in charge of the 4-H agent, you know, to make them feel

uncomfortable. It needs to be more like agent buddies, you know, mentor...And my famous saying is, 'I don't know what I don't know.' And I mean really...I don't know some agents when they're hired they go through a couple of interviews. So maybe when you get to that end and it's I don't know; one, two, three, how did they do it? If even the mentor could just come in at some point and meet them. Just to make or sit with them in the lobby and just say, you know, just talk to them...to maybe get some of that anxiety and to say, you know, I don't think the mentor needs to get up there and say look they're not telling me the truth, you're never getting a raise, you're working all the time. I don't think it needs to be that but I think it needs to be just...talking and a lot's going to come out in talking. You know if you have a young mom with her 4-H background and she's showing you pictures of her baby and oh, she cries every day; they leave them at the babysitter. You know, you don't want this job. You know what I'm saying. Don't hire somebody and two months after be looking for somebody else. I think if they just talked you could kind of you know. Even the one's you're kind of iffy about I think a mentor could talk to them and you could find out a lot of things. Okay do y'all know this person has no, you know? ...Hasn't dealt with school kids before...And I don't know if that would even be, you know, because then of course the mentor would then find out exactly who were the last applicants for the job...I think it needs to be the same kind of 4-H. You know, neighboring...Because nine times out of ten you and your neighbor do the same kind of work...Just because demographics, locations... It would have to totally be changed; it would have to be a big focus for somebody to take under their wing and almost kind of like what you're doing. Like go around and say what do y'all want? What do y'all don't like? What do y'all like? And then, you know, that would be your job to fix it...Yeah, because it could be very beneficial...But now with the way things are I don't even know if it's possible...I don't even

know... Yeah, I don't think mentoring is one of their priorities right now, which could be because it could really help. I think sometimes we lose a lot of good agents. When you get that e-mail and they today's my last day and you're like, "Oh, I don't want to lose him."

- **Respondent 5**

"I think it can be more effective if there's some kind of time frame. Like you've got to have some kind of, you know, follow up every month or two. Or every quarter...maybe it needs to be some kind of mandatory whatever, I don't know but something in writing where both ends are saying what I've done and how she's and...to see if it's working... I think I would have somebody in charge. Like maybe the regional coordinator that met with me. Like maybe quarterly or periodically both of them. Informally or formally, I don't know if you could fill something out and then met or whatever but just know that is this working or is this not working. Have I never seen my mentor, if you've never seen your mentor why. You know, cause if it's not working then they don't even need to have it. But I think it could work...if there was some kind of accountability...You could make it work...I guess you'd have to have some funding too...but I think it needs to be another person to kind of intervene to say okay this is who I assigned you and, you know, they could talk to that person without the mentor. The mentor could talk to the other one without that person being there and say no she's not doing...So that other third person could kind of intervene and make it work...if it is total personality where they just hate each other for some reason or whatever then you, they don't need to mentor them. Everybody always, you know, sometimes personalities. Then you could assign somebody else and say okay, you need to do this, this, and that and share your ideas. It used to be go to a club meeting or try to go to one of their meetings and they try to go to one of your meetings. But I think it was all kind of just thrown out there. It wasn't really...structured. That's the word...I think it can be productive but it needs to be structured...And say you need to...maybe we need

to meet every quarter for an hour and maybe they could do it before quarterly meetings...maybe it could be 30 minutes to kind of evaluate or talk about what they're doing at each... Take advantage. I mean if you have somebody that you can call, call them all the time...don't wait until you feel like you're lost. I mean, just try to, you know, find time to meet with them as much as you can. And I think going in to the parish and kind of seeing what they have and, you know, take them to schools and kind of let them know your clientele because you may be working with two different. If you're a mentor where you're mentoring maybe a whole different situation and for you tell somebody how to do things may not work in their parish. I think you need to kind of go to them and try to learn the parish. Or kind of know a little bit about the demographics. And I think that's why they try to put you with similar type counties with similar demographics...we need it to be a whole positive thing. Like you just keep working with that person until it worked...Not a supervisor kind of thing but just somebody coming to help. You know, and it may be that not necessarily sit in their office but to go out in the field with them...I think it needs... Somebody that just says, you know, I want to come really informal...And I think the school system, you know, has a lot of those kind of people. I mean I noticed that last year. There were some people that were just kind of in and out of the classrooms and she said oh we're here for support...and they would be in a class that had a lot of wild discipline problems, but it wasn't like those teachers were intimidated. They were glad because she was there to try to help them try to make it. . . Yeah because I think sometimes you think, you feel like you lack that. You just kind of up against the wall and you just can't get it all done and you're overwhelmed and you've got this due and that due. And to have somebody come and to kind of help and support would...encourage, motivate...I get a lot of positive support or whatever. I feel like I do, you know, people say good job whatever. But I think some of these people might not.

You know, they don't see anybody. They just kind of do their thing and you say, you know, you need I don't know. You need that encouragement and motivation...I think you need some time lines. You know, and maybe just on your calendar like, check in with or because I think you get so wrapped up in your daily program of work that you don't always think. I think you could have good intentions but to follow through you need time lines to say I need to check on her this week. You know, just see how things are going. What's working, what's not working. You definitely need that. I don't know if monthly or. But it's needs to be done... I think it's just trial and error. You try to assign somebody by, you know, distance. You try to get somebody close that might work and then if it doesn't and it's not working then you just stop either intervene that person over it. . .and try to make it work or just, if the two people really don't want. You have to want it...If they don't want it then you either reassign something else or you just get rid of it. You can't force...I mean you can force it on paper and say it's working. But if it's really not, you know, helping them...you can't make them...But I think a third person in there, you know, like assessing and I do think having time lines, you know, and letting each one know, I'm going to check on you once a month or whatever or the week of such and such. If you hadn't heard from, you know, give me a call or whatever. Just kind of get both of them to where they're communicating...And then, maybe sharing at the end...overall evaluating...how this helped, how this didn't help so that the next year when they're putting the next one's together you can make suggestions. Share this or this worked for this."

- **Respondent 6**

"I'm on the side that it wasn't very positive. If you lose a mentor then you have somebody reassigned...Right away...And you should look about who within the Ag Center is a good – because I even recommended this. I think you have a list of resources of people that are the go to people...Because, you know, we have the Ag Center directory but, you know, you open

it up and there are all these names. Well, if I really need information about livestock on cattle; well, if I'm a new agent and maybe my mentor is not a person that deals with livestock well they won't know...So, you know, okay cattle XXXX. You call XXXX...When it came to poultry XXXX even though he's in my parish but he's the district superintendent of poultry. Call XXXX...So stuff like that. But the main thing is if you have a mentor and if you lose them, you're reassigned to somebody else...Not too formal. Not to the point to where that because if you're a mentor you still have to do your job just as well as that person has to do theirs...But, you know, calling about once a week. Saying hey, how are you doing, what issues have you had, especially during club time...Well after that first week you call and say, "Okay how'd your clubs go?" ...Any issue arises, kind of any questions that you may have. They're really pushing the experiential learning model now...How did that go? Do you have any questions about that? And if they're sending e-mails kind of as reminders, "Hey this is something, you know, livestock entries are due. You may, you know, make sure that you did these," and all this is done as a second reminder...And then after that then after you get into the routine of things then it should come easier...I would say to have a thumb on it, would be about a year...And then after that I think that you should have somebody to kind of follow up...You know, every once in a while to still say, "Hey are you still doing okay?" ...Well it could be that same person...Well I think it'd be up to the regional coordinators to make sure that that person is actually doing what they're supposed to do...To me that's what a regional coordinator's supposed to do is make sure that the 4-H programs in their counties fit the motto of the 4-H makes the best better...Well, how can you make the best better if you don't know what is wrong with that area, within the program? ...So if you have a very weak mentor teaching a newcomer bad habits, you need to make sure that you nip that...Because they do the assigning...I would think on the evaluation piece of it

would be this is what I didn't get out of it and this is what I would think that I would need...more feedback instead of well my mentor didn't do a very good job or ...This is what I got out of it, this is what I didn't, and this is what I need...I would do that on the mentee not the mentor...And then submit that to the regional coordinators and then the coordinators could get back to the mentor and say, "Okay, you know, this is what was left out. You did a good job in this but this was kind of left out." So, you know, not chastising them and saying well maybe next time this is what you need to kind of work on...And I wouldn't think that there would be really a training that needs to be done especially if you have seasoned agents like XXXX, she's been around for a long time so you wouldn't need to really tell her, "Okay, this is what you need to tell them." Okay she's already lived it...So throughout the year eventually I'm sure all that will come out...You already know what to expect, what's going to happen... just little things like I said before about 4-H U. I didn't know where anything was down there. Well, XXXX, you know, he was there and he took me around a tour of the campus. He said this is where the animal science building is. This is where if you send soil samples, this is where it's going...This is where the vet science buildings are. The veterinarian program is off campus, it's over here. This is the procedures to get in...I had recommended that one of the new agent trainings be on campus...So they can show the different buildings and stuff like that... Just to show caring, concern that you're not in it by yourself; you're not in it alone. I have had the same problems as you have ...as you going through an agent, you know, stuff like that...Because like I said I will reach out if ...I don't know something I'm going to reach out...Yeah, now some that don't like I said don't feel comfortable...I can see where they would say feel overwhelmed and have that sink or swim type mentality...Yeah and if you do something wrong that's okay it's a mistake you learn from it and you go on...help them think things out...And, you know, everybody says,

“Well you can always go back and rely on your regional coordinator.” Well that’s true to a point...But, you know, like I said regional coordinators are over everything so a lot of times they don’t have the time to sit down and “baby you” I guess you want to say...So that’s why you have that one person that you can half way rely on and say, “Hey, I’m having problems.” ...I would say that first, you know, you would have to be knowledgeable, number one about the ins and outs of the XXXX...when stuff is due, what to look for and those types of things...And yourself not afraid to ask questions; not afraid to be able to give constructive criticism...Give it back to the person you’re mentoring. Just caring and understanding because it’s – I guess you could have the analogy of it’s a child that you’re trying to grow up to as an adult cause they don’t know anything about what’s going on.”

- **Respondent 7**

“Just sharing programs because that’s the stuff that I struggled with in the beginning, like, “I can really teach whatever I want?” Where do I go from here, you know. She just helped me with that and I always like getting her ideas for junior leader meetings. She always had fun games to play with them; stuff that had been tried because I can look up stuff on the internet and print it off but I’ve never actually seen if the kids like it or not. It keeps you from wasting time...I hear that a lot when I’m talking with personnel from 4-H. Why reinvent the wheel?... I guess I would do the same thing with e-mail correspondence and maybe do the live meeting. But also if she can’t come to some of the stuff, I can still send her pictures and let her know the agenda for things and how it went...To have something set in stone that way everybody’s getting the same mentor experience. Well, it’s never going to be the same, but at least there’s a structure and you know what you’re supposed to be doing. Yes, I think that would be good... there’s got to be a way to just test people’s personality and know if they will be a good one or not. Because I don’t think that being a bad mentor makes somebody a bad person or a bad worker. It just

might not be what they are made to do...Age...a lot of people when they get close to retirement, they, you know, not that they don't care as much anymore, but, I don't know, they're just not full of fresh ideas, or whatever and she was the exception. She is still enthused and she has lots of energy and loves 4-H...I don't think she wanted to retire...Make it equal for everybody. Just find somebody good for people. I don't know...Distance...A little closer proximity, but then you balance personality and you might not be able to get them really close to each other.

- **Respondent 8**

“I think is important that you have similar personalities and...then your philosophy on youth development I think needs to be kind of the same...Or at least be willing to learn from each other...Yeah, or maybe priorities aren't exactly the same in programming...Or maybe they're working on things that I don't have experience with so I can't really provide resources as much as – like one of my passions is junior leadership and team leadership and so I can't really be helpful in the livestock program...so maybe I used the wrong word in philosophy but programming areas...So a mentor and a mentee would match up better if they had those same areas...if you have a really shy quiet person and you put a wide open person that person may be giving them suggestions because it comes natural to them whereas this shy quiet person it may; those things don't come natural in terms of public speaking or whatever...I would think that the regional coordinator would have met them. I mean that's an assumption but I'm pretty sure that they would have met enough times with the new agent to have somewhat of a take on their personality...there has to be a comfort level there if it's going to be effective... if you don't feel comfortable with your mentor then what's the point, you know?... I think there could be some time before a transition takes place to prepare the 4-H agent that's transferring. I would say if they're five years or less with the XXXX just to prepare them that this is going to be different and one of my biggest lessons is when you leave you leave. You still have relationships with

certain people just because you work with them so much...you let the new 4-H agents handle the responsibilities...And you also take care of your parish stuff, your new parish stuff. It makes me think that there would even be a good chance to have a mentoring program when you change roles possibly... I think it can if we go back to what we talked about earlier about personalities and about, you know, trusting, getting along with each other and then that mentor, the formal one truly wanting to help and going to give the extra time. Because we're in budget cuts and everyone doesn't have any time. We're all in the same boat in terms of that. Then that the mentee is open to learning and listening. I think that is also another important concept for success... I haven't heard anybody say they Skype or they do live messenger or anything like that with their mentor... time is an issue, but I guess tie it back into your evaluation. If you're a mentor and you have to report back on so many professional development if it falls under that category of our reporting system...and you have so many days then to talk about that in our yearly evaluation at the end of the year and not five minutes worth of talk but to evaluate and say – but then that's only one time that year that you're evaluating it. I don't know if it's a bad situation and you let it go on for a year. What have you done? ...it may be a better system of check points. Do the regional coordinators have time for that? I don't know...even if I as a mentor refer to the guidelines...on the first visit, you know, this is what you need to go over...And it ties back to purpose and objectives but the second visit you need to talk about...make sure you touch on XXXX or reporting or whatever, or make sure you talk about building relations with volunteers...If you had a little checklist for me and not everybody's going to follow that obviously, but at least I'll have a base to start up with if I was a mentor; you meet with them and you say, "Well, what are you having problems with?" ...my first mentee that I worked with was like ...I'm just so overwhelmed. Okay, well why are you overwhelmed? Then

that way if the mentee knew what was going to be covered he or she could have her questions and really reflect upon them....Not that that will happen but in my mind I like lists and things so that would work for me.....I want a binder...of information that's what I want...Guidelines and what am I supposed to do...as a mentor.”

### **Themes**

During the process of gathering, analysis, and synthesis of data, the peer debriefer was consulted and carefully guided the researcher. Epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation were implemented by the researcher throughout the course of the study (Moustakas, 1994). After the researcher completed clustering of the meaning units, the peer debriefer judiciously reviewed the content. The researcher and peer debriefer agreed on the themes of the study through reflective meditation and imaginative variation. Moustakas (1994) suggested, “Cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into the thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.” Appropriately following the analysis process for phenomenological qualitative data, the researcher checked for similarities among themes and meaning units. The core elements of respondents’ experiences are represented in the themes (Table 4) supported by the meaning units.

### **Composite Textural-Structural Description**

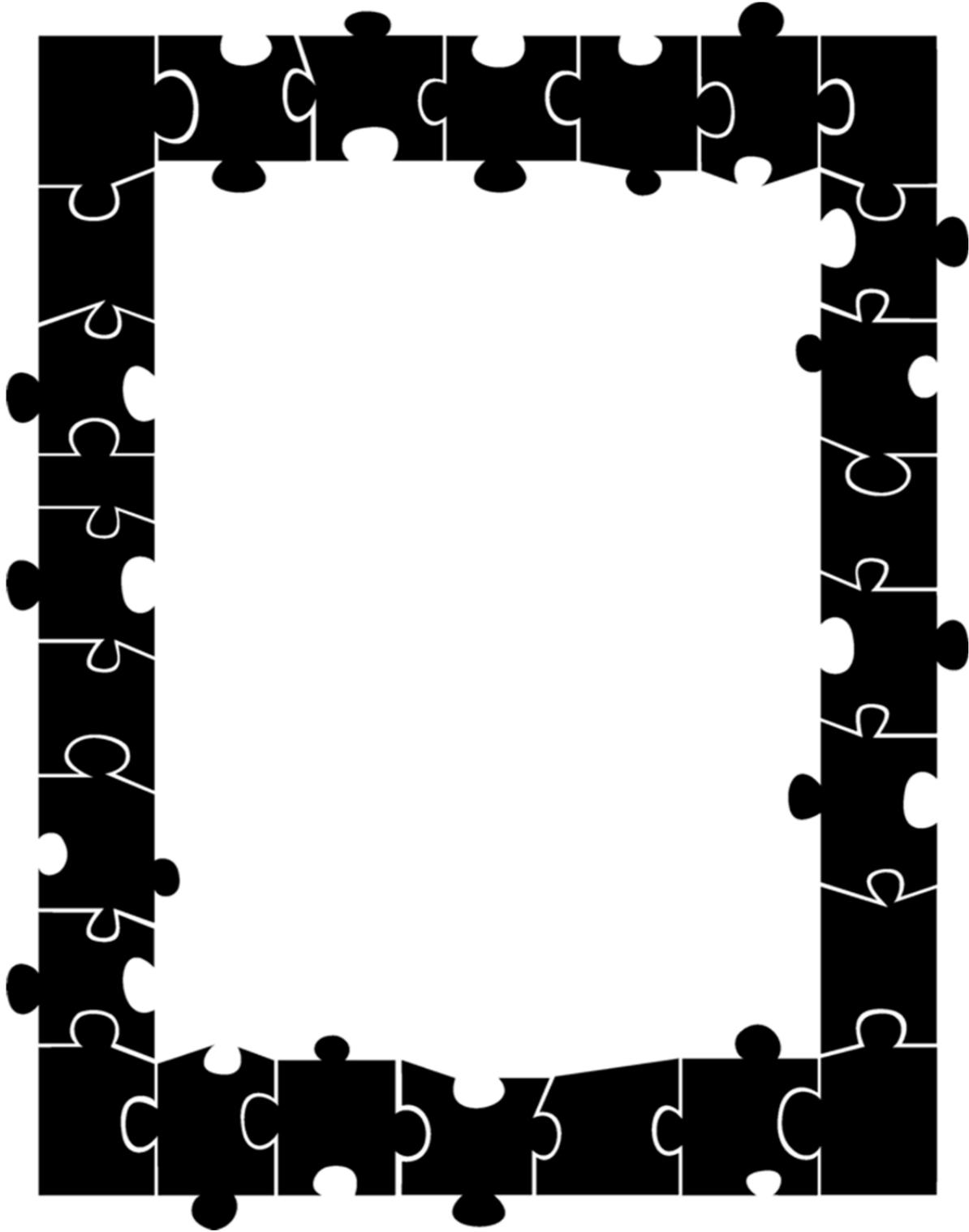
An additional review of the transcripts of each respondent’s experiences was completed by the researcher to capture deeper meaning. At this point, the meaning units were further integrated in the themes agreed upon by the researcher and the peer debriefer. A recommended step in presentation of findings from Miles and Huberman (1994) is to advocate for a specifically formatted presentation of results using graphic organizers coupled with vivid and structured writing.

Table 4. Themes And Descriptions Of The Lived Experiences Of 4-H Youth Educators' Mentoring Involvement.

Theme	Description
Time	Overwhelming schedules of 4-H youth educators demanding many hours outside of the normal workday that also minimize the opportunities for mentoring interaction
Distance/Geography	Human networks spanning various parts of the state and either enhancing or weakening the potential of the mentoring relationship based on time constraints for travel
Incentive/Budget	Financial compensation or motivation, career growth, financial constraints among Cooperative Extension and higher education
Personality	Character, disposition, and temperament working with others including assigned mentors
Program Area	Area of expertise or focus on positive program development provided to 4-H members
Formal/Informal	Determination of the nature of structure of the mentoring relationships among 4-H youth educators
Understanding	Definition of mentoring, clarity in deciphering aspects of mentoring as opposed to other closely related terms

Moustakas (1994) noted, "Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Textural Description* of the experience. Include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview" (p. 121). He continued, "Construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Structural Description* of the experience based on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation" (p. 121).

After constructing individual textural descriptions and individual structural descriptions, the researcher continued to follow closely in proper analysis and synthesis. Consistently reflecting on the process of Moustakas' modified version of van Kaam's method of analysis of qualitative data and again analyzing the transcripts of each respondent's lived experience, the researcher proceeded to construct a composite model of the thematic textural and structural descriptions that represent the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). The seven themes of the lived experiences of 4-H youth educators' mentoring involvement are represented in Figure 1.



Thematic Textural-Structural Composite

Figure 1. Thematic Textural-Structural Composite

The themes show a thematic textural-structural composite, as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that have not been put into place. Therefore, the puzzle is incomplete.

This correlates with the mentoring program across the state within the organization according to the lived experiences of the participants in this qualitative study. Time, Distance/Geography, Incentive/Budget, Personality, Program Area, Formal/Informal, and Understanding are the seven themes that are not in the right place and keeping the puzzle from being complete. Consequently, an effective and efficient formal mentoring program for the 4-H youth educators in this state will not be complete until these key pieces are placed accordingly.

### **Time**

Four-H youth educators participating in this study have demanding schedules requiring overtime on nights and weekends. Four-H youth educators regularly chaperone overnight trips for 4-H members, including three, four and five day camping experiences. Each day in the office also presents full schedules for the youth educators. Club meetings around the parish at different schools on different days of the month, contests involving different program area knowledge, and youth leadership and instruction are three aspects of a youth educator's job description demanding time. This demand for time potentially hinders the amount of interaction among coworkers and mentors – especially during busy times of the year like the month of September when most 4-H youth educators visit schools to start off the new club year.

### **Distance/Geography**

Four-H youth educators are located in offices across the state and the state is divided into regions for administrative purposes. Five regions around the state compose the comprehensive body of 4-H youth educators who all report to the state office at the main campus of the state university system. The distance between parish offices can span up to five hours from one side of the state to the other. Therefore, this causes great difficulty in trying to meet with fellow

youth educators that are employed and live at farther destinations. When assigned a mentor that is geographically separated from the mentee, there is a degree of strain associated with arranging interaction time, sharing time, and most of all learning time. Those mentees that work in parish offices located closer to a mentor was more likely to interact with the assigned mentor as opposed to a mentee that is located farther away in a parish office from the assigned mentor.

### **Incentive/Budget**

It was found that there is minimal, if any, incentive for 4-H youth educators to serve in the mentoring role across the state. There is no financial incentive and no incentive of career growth or promotion. However, the intrinsic and altruistic incentives were present for several participants who have served as mentors as well as participated as mentees in mentoring relationships. Also, a couple of mentees recognized the compassion and appreciation felt by mentors as an incentive.

The Cooperative Extension System of this state is in an uncertain state financially. Budget cuts and layoffs as well as hiring freezes and internal applicant job postings are commonplace at this time. There is a general bittersweet attitude and discussions of concern among 4-H youth educators in the state. There is a fear that rests inside of employees caused by worry of possibly losing a job, losing a coworker, decreased annual budgets, and many other concerns. In addition to worries and anxiety, the budget concerns and low travel funds offered to 4-H youth educators hinder the amount of interaction between mentors and mentees throughout the state.

### **Personality**

Mentors and mentees are not promised a relationship of bountiful joy and harmony when assigned to mentoring relationships. It is readily the case that mentors and mentees have opposing personalities leading to challenging mentoring experiences for both involved. On the

other hand, mentors and mentees that have agreeable mentalities and personalities were found to get along quite well. As mentioned by one participant, “Someone who is shy probably would not want to and does not need to be assigned to a mentor who is really outgoing, outspoken, or especially loud.”

### **Program Area**

There are many program areas with the Cooperative Extension System and 4-H. Livestock programs, outdoor shooting sports, cookery, science and technology, pet care, and many other recreational and instructional program areas are offered to members. Four-H youth educators are most often assigned to specific program areas with a few exceptions in which duties are handled by one person in a parish. Participants clearly stated their belief in placing mentees with mentors with similar programming assignments. This recommendation was specified by each and every participant.

### **Formal/Informal**

The nature of the structure within mentoring relationships was a defining factor for several of the participants in this study. There were many unsuccessful formal mentoring relationships among participants. However, every participant in the study was found to have at least one informal mentor at work. Most of the participants had three, four, and five informal mentors that could be called and consulted no matter the day of the week or time of day.

According to the transcribed lived experiences of the 4-H youth educators who participated in the study, the formally assigned mentoring relationships had very little structure and expectations. Also, there was very little, if any, evaluation of the program or the relationships between mentees and mentors. Finally, feedback was not requested uniformly. Consistency throughout formally assigned mentoring relationships did not exist among participants throughout the state.

## **Understanding**

There was always hesitancy and periods of silence between the time participants were asked by the researcher their definition of mentoring and their reply to the question. Several participants even made comments. For instance, two participants in the study shared, “This is a hard question” or “I’m not really sure what my definition is of mentoring in this profession.” The researcher found a lack of continuity among the participants in addressing ‘mentoring’ when asked to define the term.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FINDINGS

### Summary

Mentoring among 4-H youth educators is vital to retention rates for the organization and quality of life for new employees. It is clear that new employees need a greater support network to combat overwhelming feelings during their first year as a 4-H youth educator. Four-H youth educators fulfill dynamic roles that require flexibility and openness among other more experienced youth educators. Exposure to activities, information, and a mentor's experiences has potential to strengthen the working capacity of a youth educator. This exposure can be made available to new 4-H youth educators through a formal mentoring program.

A formal mentoring program may be complex. However, the complexity of a well-designed and organized program brings positive professional development opportunities in an individual capacity to the work environment. Moberg and Velasquez (2004) shared their implications and views of the complexity and ethical concerns of mentoring in the following excerpts:

The current popularity of mentoring reflects a confluence of interests among jobholders in search of career success and organizations in search of an effective mechanism for developing and retaining employees. Indeed, one finds almost as much published career advice encouraging employees to find and cultivate a mentor as one finds published management advice encouraging organizations to profit from mentoring as a management tool. (p. 95)

We begin our analysis by briefly recounting the mentoring dysfunctions that have been chronicled. We then attempt to refine our understanding of the mentoring process with particular reference to the historical derivation of the term "mentor." This enables us to describe a model of the ethical responsibilities of the mentor. Our model is based on a quasi-professional conception of mentoring derived from a standard ethical framework composed of utilitarianism, justice, rights, and caring. Next, since mentoring involves two parties, we indicate the nature and extent of the moral responsibilities that protégés have. And finally, we discuss some of the practical implications of this analysis. (p. 96)

It is also inappropriate to conceptualize the mentoring relationship as a contractual relationship. It is true that both mentor and protégé should establish beforehand what each expects from the other. Nevertheless, the metaphor of contract implies that mentor

and protégé bargain as equals. Yet the relationship is one of inherent inequality. The mentor has significantly more power than the protégé, and while the mentor provides significant benefits to the protégé, the protégé provides few comparable benefits to the mentor. (p. 98)

...the role of mentor is a *quasi-professional* role in three fundamental respects. First, the role of mentor can be defined in terms of a service relationship that one person, the mentor has toward another person, the protégé: the mentor, as we have seen, provides knowledge, wisdom, and developmental support in the interests of the protégé. Secondly, like the professions, the mentoring relationship is characterized by power distance. The greater power of the mentor over the protégé derives from several sources: the mentor's greater experience and knowledge, the mentor's senior standing in the organization, and, often, the mentor's superior formal authority relative to the protégés. Thirdly, the role of mentor has characteristics that are insignificantly similar to (if not exactly like) the three primary characteristics that Bayles identifies: (1) although the role of mentor need not involve formal training, mentors must go through some kind of extensive learning process in order to be able to provide the learning and wisdom expected of their role, (2) such learning, even when heavily experimental, must nevertheless involve an intellectual component since it must be communicable to the protégé in an intelligible way, and (3) the service mentors provide is important to society insofar as it enables organizations, to transfer learning to new generations of members. pp. (99-100)

After interviewing seven 4-H youth educators with a range of 1-5 years of experience with the 4-H Youth Development Organization, a vision has been drawn of a jigsaw puzzle in a holding phase in the construction state with a completed border and pieces all across sitting in no order. The lived experiences of the youth educators that were formally assigned mentors within their first year as an Extension agent and participants in this study led the researcher to the conclusion that no real mentoring is occurring within the organization through the formal program established in this particular state.

Four-H youth educators work through many weeks of inconsistency and unbelievable variation during their workdays. One day may begin with an office meeting. Next, a youth educator may go to an elementary school for a club meeting. Then, they may move on to another school. However, before making it to the next school for a junior high or high school club meeting during last period of the school day, a parent calls complaining about a problem their child is experiencing with a livestock show animal. On the next day a youth educator may be

teaching demonstration skills, public speaking, or citizenship workshops. Later at night on the same day of the week, the 4-H youth educator may be responsible for advising junior leaders during a planning meeting for a service learning project to be held the following month. The role of a 4-H youth educator is very much unsolidified requiring adaptability, willingness to go the extra mile for members, and understanding of a plethora of research-based information as well as life issues and problems that may occur in the lives of youth and adolescents.

Four-H youth educators are expected to be of considerable devotion to youth, fellow staff members, volunteers, and adults who care for the youth. These educators need a formal mentoring program for many reasons. This need for a solid and progressive formal mentoring program found in research-based literature as well as the downfalls of the currently implemented program in this particular state encourage a more in-depth needs assessment among 4-H youth educators. The findings of the needs assessment in combination with the findings exposed in this phenomenological study of the lived experience among 4-H youth educators in a particular state regarding their perceptions of the value of mentoring would contribute to a grounded orientation into the new role being filled. The seven aspects uncovered in the study clustered into meaning units and needing to be pieced together in the jigsaw puzzle of a thematic textural-structural composite are essential to the enhancement and implementation of a successful formal mentoring program for 4-H youth educators across the country especially during times of budget changes and shortages.

State administration, experienced youth educators, and new employees must all take an active role in making a formal mentoring program successful and beneficial to all parties involved. It is a group effort among the members of the organization. State administrators who design, implement, and assess the impact of the formal mentoring program have great

responsibility to the 4-H youth educators, 4-H members, and their parents and volunteer leaders to make the best better in all situations. Experienced youth educators, who most probably have a number of years of involvement with the organization and readily assigned mentees, must invest in the new employees that are enlisted as mentees. In addition, great obligation rests with the new youth educator. They must be open and willing to accept guidance and help from a mentor. Also, the mentee must be clear with the assigned mentor about their expectations and needs.

Findings suggest there needs to be greater understanding of mentoring and mentoring relationships among the state 4-H youth educators. Also, a decision needs to be made regarding the degree of formality and informality of a professional development mentoring program.

Bozeman and Feeney (2007) provided the following definition of mentoring, insisting mentoring is an informal process,

Mentoring: a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé). (p. 731)

The discrepancy between formal and informal mentoring as well as the lived experiences of the participants of this study proved to exhibit the need for administration to take an in-depth look at the mentoring program. Significant comments and findings solidify the lack of standardization and results of the formal mentoring program for the 4-H youth educators who participated in this study. Continuing with the statements noted by Bozeman and Feeney (2007),

Another implication of our definition, an especially important one, is that mentoring is an informal social exchange. This means that the term “formal mentoring” is an oxymoron. This does not mean, however, that the thousands of formal mentoring programs set up in organizations do not result in mentoring relationships, only that they do not develop on command. The question of whether someone in a formal mentoring program has a mentor is an empirical question. (p. 732)

It is vital to start with fundamental knowledge regarding the term ‘mentoring’ and theory behind it before expecting mentors and mentees to receive the greatest benefit from participation and investment in a formal mentoring program. Bozeman and Feeney (2007) suggested

If one agrees that mentoring theory is underdeveloped, one can perhaps also agree that there are many reasons why this is the case. The work is, commendably, multidisciplinary and, thus, draws from many theoretical perspectives. But this has had the effect of fragmenting theory. Mentoring research is often, and commendably, instrumental in its motivations. But this has had the effect of certain impatience with continuity and broad-based explanation. In our judgment, the most important reason for limited progress toward a more unifying theory of mentoring is a failure to confront some of the lingering conceptual gaps in research and theory. In many instances, important studies of mentoring do not even provide a careful definition of the phenomenon. In most instances it is not easy to sort mentoring from adjacent concepts such as training, coaching, socialization, and even friendship. Our critique has sought, with the application of a thought experiment, to highlight some of the conceptual issues that require attention if research is to produce more powerful explanations. (p. 735)

### **Recommendations**

Based on information gathered through an extensive literature review and the lived experiences of the participants in this study, I have selected seven areas for consideration to improve the quality of the 4-H youth educator mentoring program. I will provide recommendations and possible solutions for enhancement based on research and findings from the participants’ spoken accounts of their personal experiences with mentoring as 4-H youth educators. The following areas, represented in the conceptual model (jigsaw) in Chapter 4, are given consideration to significantly increase the amount of activity and benefits of the formal mentoring program for 4-H youth educators within the state.

#### **Recommendation I: Time**

Four-H youth educators are stretched thin throughout the week trying to accommodate busy schedules across the parish and state. There is a shortage of time during the work day and work week for most 4-H youth educators. It is important to take notice of the tension felt by 4-H youth educators to take on yet another “task” on the to-do list sent from state administration. In

addition, after acknowledging there is a lack of time to spend with mentees, 4-H youth educators should be provided with an objective-based timeline specifically tailored for mentors to provide clearer understanding and standardization across the state. Implementing a timeline for the mentoring program will contribute to the solution for the problem of lack of time to “do mentoring” across the state for 4-H youth educators. There should be routine visits between the mentor and the mentee such as the possibility of one visit per month.

A time line should be developed based on research of successful mentoring programs across the nation focusing efforts on those professions with similar job requirements. The time line should be designed by an appointed committee consisting of administration, regional coordinators, and youth educators who have a vested interest in the success of a formal mentoring program. Also, the members of this committee should have a clear understanding of the term mentoring and the many aspects of mentoring relationships. In addition to background knowledge and experience in youth development, this understanding will provide ample benefits to the design and implementation of a standardized timeline for a state mentoring program.

***Possible Solutions:***

- Acknowledge there is a lack of time for another program and provide mentors and mentees with time management instruction for the implementation and conduct a mentoring program.
- Assign members to a committee to develop a time line for the mentoring program.
- Insist on monthly, routine visits between mentor and mentee.

**Recommendation II: Distance/Geography**

The observation was made that mentees who were assigned mentors at a greater distance had less interaction with their mentors. Therefore, it is indicative that mentees be assigned to mentors that are geographically closer in location. Mentees need to be assigned to mentors in a more strategic way.

Assigning mentees to mentors in a more strategic way across the board including geographical distance will enhance the follow through of the formal mentoring program in addition to decreasing the impact of other areas of difficulty such as time constraints and budget issues. Minimizing the potential travel time and driving distance between mentees and mentors will decrease the need for planning entire days to visit and work together. This will decrease the amount of time taken away from a youth educator's own parish, as many cited being a problem. Also, this would reduce costs spent of fuel and travel.

***Possible Solutions:***

- Develop a list of potential mentors within the region that are within close proximity to mentees.
- Follow up on the ability of mentees to interact with mentors within weeks and months of assignment.

**Recommendation III: Incentive/Budget**

There is no incentive or reward. It was noted that participants believe there may be intrinsic benefit for the mentor in the formal mentoring relationship. However, there are no tangible incentives or rewards offered to mentors for serving as a mentor in the formal mentoring program across the state. There are potential incentives that could be taken advantage of to reward mentors for effort and valuable time devoted to serving in the mentoring role.

Also, as previously mentioned, fuel costs, low travel budgets and other costs associated with traveling to work with mentors hinders the productivity and effectiveness of a formal mentoring program for the mentees across the state. A lack of monetary resources is causing a large assortment of issues for our state, nation, and world, as well as the 4-H Youth Development organization. Accounting for this lack of monetary resources and other effects brought about by

the trickle-down effect of budget cutbacks is essential in making improvements to the formal mentoring program for the state.

***Possible Solutions:***

- Inquire among previous and current mentors about the possibility of an incentive-based approach to rewarding mentors for service in a mentoring program.
- Formulate an incentive-based approach to reward mentors for investing in the mentoring relationship and the professional development of mentees.

**Recommendation IV: Personality**

Again, mentors must be assigned in a more strategic way to mentees. Although, it is difficult to determine which personalities may mesh better between mentees and mentors, consideration must be given to the personalities of potential participants in a formal mentoring program. First of all, a person may not be the best mentor if one's personality is not conducive to sharing, helping or showing compassion. Also, a person's personality may not be conducive to the personality of the assigned mentee.

The personality of both potential mentors and mentees must be considered during the selection and assignment processes. New employees need encouragement, instruction, and reassurance from those surrounding them in the work environment. A mentor is a potentially valuable source for all of these aforementioned needs.

***Possible Solutions:***

- Have potential mentors complete a psychologically based personality test to gather information about their personality type.
- Have new employees complete a psychologically based personality test to gather information about their personality type.
- Match the results of the personality tests to potentially create positive mentoring relationships.

## **Recommendation V: Program Area**

Very similar to assigning mentees to mentors with similar personalities, the area of programming for youth educators is an area of big concern among mentees in assignment of a mentor. For example, livestock is one area of programming that the assignment based on programming area matters significantly. Four-H youth educators are assigned to various program areas including, food and nutrition, healthy living, and livestock. In some counties, they are given specific assignments to manage one or several specific areas of programming. Whereas in other counties, the 4-H youth educators may be given the appointment to handle all programming areas. This distinction in appointment has a significant impact on the mentoring relationship between mentors and mentees. The area of programming must be identified as an essential area of consideration in the assignment process for the mentoring program.

### ***Possible Solutions:***

- Take into account the specific program areas of focus for 4-H youth educators when assigning mentees to mentors.
- Collect and synthesize data from feedback on mentoring relationships in which mentors and mentees had similar programming assignments and those that did not have similar programming assignments.

## **Recommendation VI: Formal/Informal**

Although every participant in the study was assigned a formal mentor, there was a range of variation among the factors and outcomes with this program. First of all, mentees were told of their involvement in a mentoring program at different times during their first year of employment. In addition, the mentees were told who their assigned mentors would be at different points during their first year of employment. There was anxiety associated with the disclosure of this information for several participants.

The formal assigning and disclosure of information regarding a youth educator's participation and expectations in the formal mentoring program must be made available at a recognized point in the hiring process. Also, clear guidelines must be established, disseminated, and explained to all youth educators in the program to reduce anxiety and take full advantage of the potential of the formal mentoring program.

In all career fields, individuals tend to seemingly find informal mentors. This is the case in 4-H youth development as well. Every participant reported having at a minimum three informal mentors other than the formally assigned mentor. The participants reported developing a mentoring relationship with the regional coordinator of their area. However, this counters what is found in the literature about a mentoring relationship. Regional coordinators are in a supervisory role and responsible for reporting that can prevent or yield promotions and other critical decisions that affect the career development of 4-H youth educators. This is a conflict of interest and not a formal mentoring relationship.

***Possible Solutions:***

- Administrators and regional coordinators should be attentive to published research and proven techniques for both formal and informal mentoring relationships.
- Thorough synthesis and selection should be conducted in making decisions as to what information, materials, and resources should be disseminated to 4-H youth educators during both formal and informal mentoring programs, educational sessions, and mentoring activities.
- Experiment with ways for formal and informal mentors for the youth educators to cooperate.

**Recommendation VII: Understanding (The Term Mentoring)**

The most direct method for improvement of the 4-H Youth Development formal mentoring program is to provide staff development focused on mentoring relationships. There is an abundance of research-based information available to not only instruct but to also encourage

the mentoring process for both mentors and mentees. It would be beneficial to offer professional development workshops focused on the value of mentoring and to consider the dissemination of specific resources from experts in the area of mentoring in a strategic way.

***Possible Solutions:***

- Administrators and regional coordinators should be attentive to published research and proven techniques for both formal and informal mentoring relationships.
- Research-based information of current developments and findings of mentoring programs should be provided to 4-H youth educators on a regular basis.

**Findings**

As the researcher, I made several interpretations through the research process. There is much less mentoring happening among 4-H youth educators than claimed by the participants. The participants cited the existence of mentoring activities and formal mentoring assignments as well as instances of interaction with formal mentors. In addition, participants acknowledged finding non-assigned, informal mentors in coworkers; and being mentored by their regional coordinators. It is the case, though, that these informal and supervisory situations do not appear to result in effective mentoring relationships. They are not developmental in nature but more functional and administrative activities to meet the bureaucratic standards of the organization.

It is crucial that administrators carefully consider the above recommendations during the process of assigning mentees to mentors. What is decided upon during the assignment process can lead to potentially beneficial or damaging effects for both the mentor and mentee in the short and long term time frames of their careers and lives. The culture of the 4-H Youth Development Organization has many functions that are unique and different from other organizations. A business or corporate mentoring program will not suit the needs of the 4-H organization because the autonomy is far too great in each parish. Also, a business or corporate mentoring program is not as likely to be beneficial or appropriate for the rapidly-changing dynamics and unique

context in which each 4-H youth educator works. Four-H youth educators need a different type of mentoring program than those often implemented among professional office settings, sales teams, and corporations. The work environment and flow for 4-H youth educators requires a unique type of drive, resourcefulness, and versatility that is not compatible to more predictable work situations.

There are, however, somewhat similar work environments and roles within the Extension organization that require certain characteristics in individuals and skill sets that enable a person to complete the mandated tasks without being overwhelmed to the point of ending their tenure with the organization. A mentoring program needs to be developed that is well-suited for 4-H youth educators, borrowing concepts from the literature and facets of successful mentoring programs used in these similar roles and work environments. The level of autonomy must be addressed in the planning and implementation of a formal mentoring program for this organization, especially in this state that has diverse representation throughout the counties.

Overall, there must be a more strategical approach to mentoring within the state for 4-H youth educators. Four-H youth educators mentor volunteer leaders on a consistent basis. However, it was found in this study that there is much discrepancy about the true meaning of mentoring. These youth educators need to be able to access mentoring for their own professional development and also to help volunteer leaders. A clearer understanding of mentoring and the purpose for a mentoring program needs to be established throughout the organization. Also, financial incentive is not necessary but must be used to encourage and compensate the mentors assigned to a mentee in a formal mentoring program.

### **Model of Formal Mentoring for 4-H Youth Educators**

It is important to note the differences as compared to corporate mentoring programs such as those discussed by Kram (1988) and the development of her mentoring theory. The research

found particular conclusions in this study that are unique to the context and dynamics of the organization and job requirements for study participants. While Kram (1988) describes theory and application to mentoring in a corporate work environment, the participants of this study are representatives of an organization that requires a mentoring program unlike that required by a corporate program.

Kram (1988) emphasized the two types of functions that are necessary in mentoring relationships – career and psychosocial functions. Also, Kram (1988) noted the four stages of mentoring relationships including the initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition stages. The researcher concluded the specifications of Kram’s mentoring theory do not coincide with the needs of the 4-H youth educator population. An extensive amount of research focusing on the formal mentoring programs offered to 4-H youth educators has not been completed. However, those that have been conducted and provided findings combined with the findings of this study are a foundation for a mentoring model.

The researcher developed a chain of supervision (Figure 2) mentoring model designed specifically for 4-H youth educators within the 4-H Youth Development Organization (Figure 3). The researcher and peer debriefers deemed it essential to the completion of this study to develop this model with the intention of providing direction for implementation and improvement of the mentoring program. The model is based off of information gathered through an extensive review of literature and the findings of this study. This model incorporates the themes derived from data analysis and synthesis in conducting this research study (Table 4) and the missing components of the present program that were found through the participants’ perceptions of their mentoring experience as a 4-H youth educator.

## Chain of Supervision for Mentoring in 4-H Youth Development

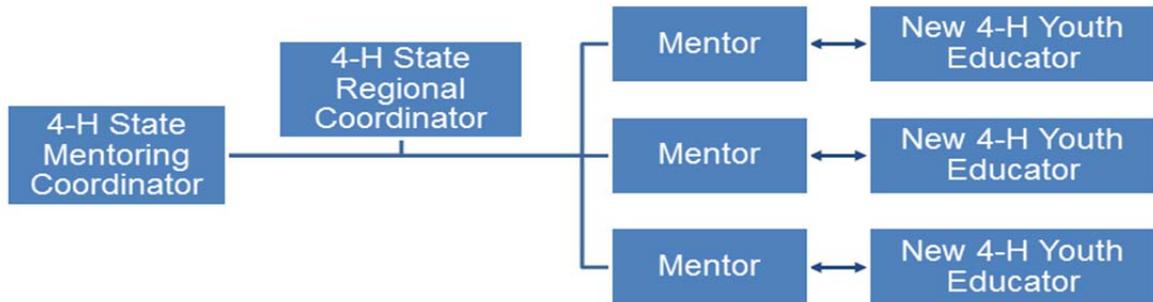


Figure 2. Chain of Supervision

It is important to understand and have awareness that no two experiences are alike. None of the 4-H youth educators situations and work environments are exactly the same. Therefore, no mentoring experience will be identical despite the implementation and administration of a statewide formal mentoring program. Personalities, parish demographics, geographical locations, and many other factors that contribute to extreme autonomy throughout the state complicate the standardization of a formal mentoring program. However, it is necessary to develop, implement, and regularly evaluate a formal mentoring program designed for 4-H youth educators as presented in the model.

Mentoring is a great asset to professional and staff development when designed, implemented, and administered properly. Mentoring has great potential to be effective across the organization in this state and for this occupation. The demands placed on youth educators are plentiful and, with the support of a positive mentoring experience, these professionals can thrive, and, in turn effectively reach out to youth. A carefully and strategically designed mentoring program would serve the organization and 4-H youth educators well. Building on the present program in place and the experience of those involved, a revamped strategic mentoring program

will be produce a great harvest of positive results for the employees, the organization, and the youth.

### Mentoring Model for First-Year 4-H Youth Educators

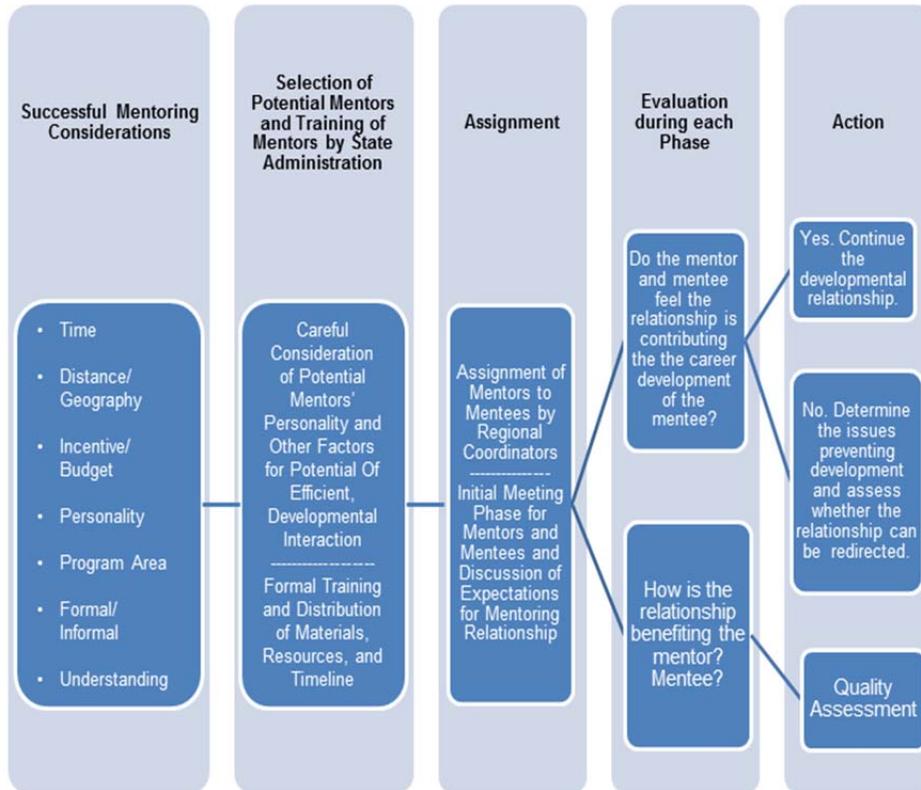


Figure 3. Bruchhaus Mentoring Model for 4-H Youth Educators during the first year of new assignment.

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# APPENDIX A: APPROVED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION

## Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight



Institutional Review Board  
 Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
 131 David Boyd Hall  
 Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
 P: 225.578.8692  
 F: 225.578.6792  
 irb@lsu.edu  
 lsu.edu/irb

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://www.lsu.edu/screeningmembers.shtml>

A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:

- (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of part B thru E.
- (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
- (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.  
 \*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
- (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
- (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtaining.com/users/login.php>.)
- (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://www.lsu.edu/irb/IRB%20Security%20of%20Data.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Allison Bruchhaus Rank: Ph.D. Student  
 Dept: SHREWD Ph: 318-880-3407 E-mail: allisonb@tigers.lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

N/A

IRB# E5593 LSU Proposal # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Complete Application  
 Human Subjects Training on file

3) Project Title: Equipped to Serve Our Youth: A Phenomenological Study of 4-H Extension Youth Educators' Perceptions of the Value of Mentoring

**Study Exempted By:**  
 Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
 Institutional Review Board  
 Louisiana State University  
 203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
 225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
 Exemption Expires: 5-28-2014

4) Proposal? (yes or no)  No  Yes, LSU Proposal Number \_\_\_\_\_

Also, if YES, either  This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant  
 OR  More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students) | Adult 4-H Extension Agents in Louisiana  
 \*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the ages, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Allison Bruchhaus Date 08/11/11 (no per signatures)

\*\* I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted  Not Exempted \_\_\_\_\_ Category/Paragraph 2  
 Reviewer Mathews Signature Robert Mathews Date 8/29/11

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

### Consent Form- Extension Educator Mentoring Study

1. **Study Title:** Equipped to Serve Our Youth: A Phenomenological Study of 4-H Extension Youth Educators' Perceptions of the Value Mentoring
2. **Performance Site:** The interviews will occur in various locations around Louisiana that are convenient to the study's participants.
3. **Investigator:** The following investigators are available for questions about this study: Ms. Allison Bruchhaus (318) 880-3407 - M –F, 9:00a.m – 4:30p.m.
4. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to explore and describe a sample of 4-H youth educators' perceptions of the value of mentoring for Extension educators (Extension educators) and to present a rich description of the lived experience for 4-H youth educators' in a mentoring program within their context through a phenomenological approach.
5. **Subject Inclusion:** The study's subjects will be Extension Youth Educators (also called 4-H agents) employed by the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, which is part of the LSU Agricultural Center.
6. **Number of subjects:** Approximately 8 will be asked to participate in 2-3 in-depth, 60-90 minute interviews at a convenient location.
7. **Study Procedures:** The study will be conducted in two phases. In the first phase, approximately 8 subjects will spend approximately 60-90 minutes in an interview addressing mentoring and the effectiveness of mentoring relationships in Extension education. In the second phase, the 8 participants will spend approximately 60 minutes in an interview addressing mentoring and the effectiveness of mentoring relationships in Extension education.
8. **Benefits:** It is anticipated that this study will capture a greater understanding of youth educators' perceptions of the mentoring of 4-H Extension youth educators. This knowledge should assist the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service to better serve the employees, the organization, and 4-H youth.
9. **Risks:** There are no known risks in this study. Only those Extension educators who agree to participate will be involved in the study. Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your-study records. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigator has access.
10. **Right to Refuse:** Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.
11. **Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.
12. **Signature:**

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Matthews, Institutional Review Board,(225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_, 2011

**Study Exempted By:**  
Dr. Robert C. Matthews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb  
Exemption Expires: .8-28-2014

## VITA

Allison Ann Bruchhaus was born in Jefferson Davis Parish and raised on a family crawfish, rice, and soybean farm in Elton, Louisiana. Allison is the daughter of Donald and Jean Ann Bruchhaus. She is the youngest sister to brothers Donald, Jr. and Michael. She graduated from Elton High School in 2000. She served as the State Secretary for the Louisiana FFA Association in 2000-2001.

She began her college education at McNeese State University and transferred to Louisiana State University in the fall of 2001. She received the Bachelor of Arts degree in mass communication with a concentration in journalism from Louisiana State University in 2004. She returned to Louisiana State University and received her Master of Science degree in human resource education in the fall of 2006.

Allison has worked for ACDI/VOCA in Washington, D.C., the 86<sup>th</sup> Air Force Squadron in Ramstein, Germany, and ESPN, Inc. in Bristol, Connecticut, during her academic career. In addition, she was an active supporter of LSU Athletics during college serving as the President of the Tiger Athletic Foundation Collegiate Club and the TAF sideline reporter. She has worked with CVT, Inc. as a Cardiovascular Sales Representative in Houston, Texas, and Assistant Director of Public Relations for Tiger Athletic Foundation in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Allison is currently the Director of College Communications and Public Relations at Louisiana College in Pineville, Louisiana. She serves the LC community in various capacities including advertising, marketing, and social media coordinator and participates in initiatives with international partnerships for the College. She is an active member of PRSA and CASE (District IV), in addition to being honored with membership to Gamma Sigma Delta and Omicron Delta Kappa earlier in her academic career.

It is Allison's goal to continue devoting time to bettering the quality of life for women, young girls, and rural youth through positive youth development programs. Allison has volunteered with the Battered Women's Center and served among troubled people groups focusing on a ministry of patience and love among village women in Africa. In addition, she serves as an international mission volunteer with the International Mission Board and has worked with groups in Belize, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Senegal.